

ARNOLD'S LITTLE BROTHER

EDNA A. BROWN







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EDNA A. BROWN

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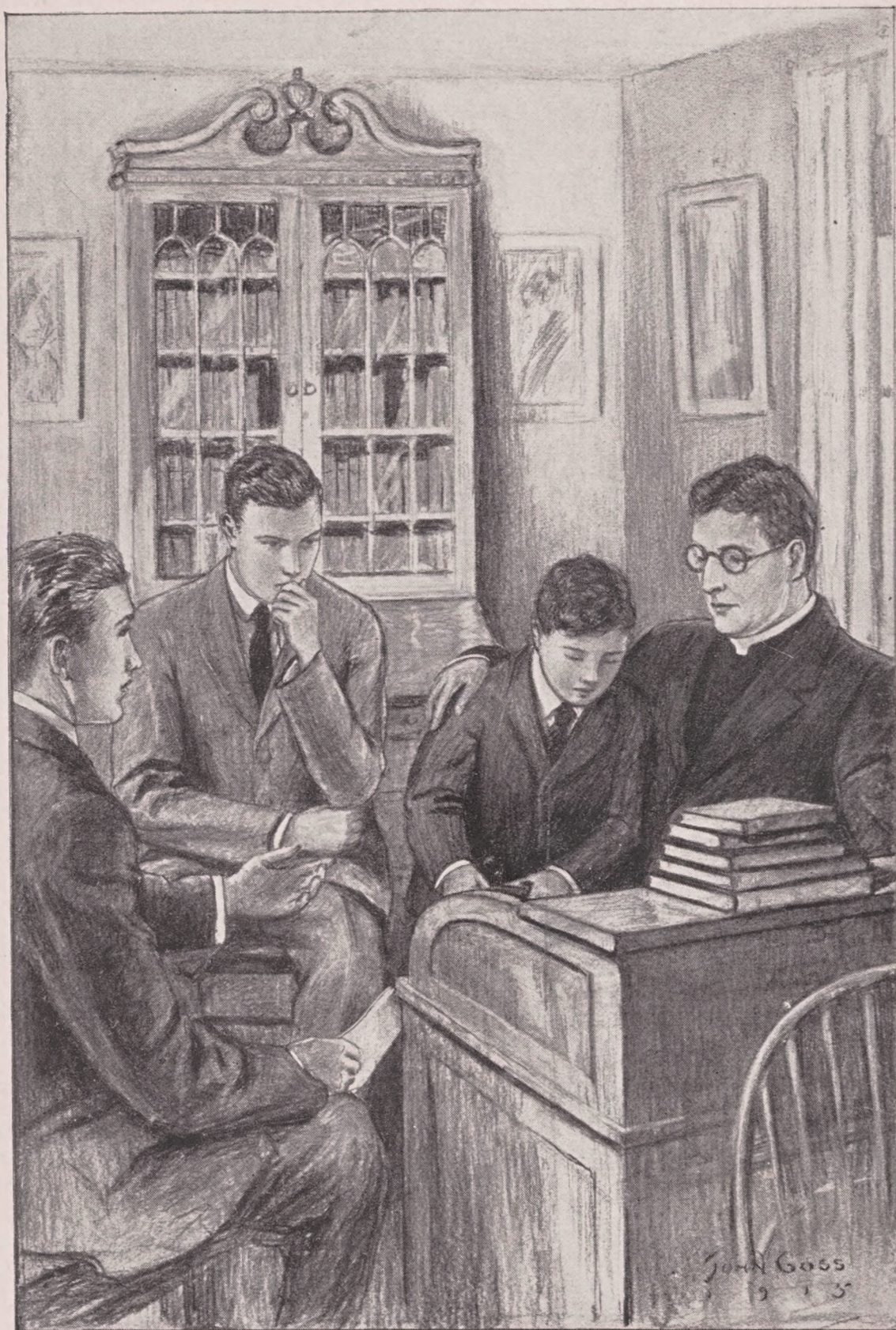
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"HE'S SUCH A LITTLE CHAP."—Page 342.

ARNOLD'S LITTLE BROTHER

BY
Adelaide
EDNA A. BROWN

Author of "Four Gordons," "Uncle David's Boys,"
"When Max Came"

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN GOSS



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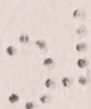
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ARNOLD'S LITTLE BROTHER



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TO
M. E. R.
FOR "DEBTS OF LOVE UNPAID."

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ARNOLD'S LITTLE BROTHER

CHAPTER I

STUDY 18

PAUL ARNOLD, dashing up to his room in Foster Hall, fresh from football practice one glorious October afternoon, entered Study 18 with great precipitancy. There resulted a head-on collision with his emerging room-mate.

"Great Scott, Paul, this is no gridiron!" remonstrated the victim of his haste.

"Beg pardon!" laughed Paul, himself recovering balance while Alex gingerly examined his nose. "Now, if you only played the game, you'd know the proper guard for an onslaught like that."

"It's quite sufficient to room with a fellow who plays," retorted Alex, recovering the eyeglasses knocked from their hold by Paul's impetuosity. "I get enough! There are some

letters on your desk," he added, disappearing down the corridor.

Paul shut the study door, went into his bedroom, pulled off his football rig, and dove into a bathrobe before examining his mail. Several evident advertisements were tossed aside without examination, leaving two personal letters, one directed in a lady's penmanship, the other as plainly by a masculine hand.

"Mother and Uncle Court," he thought. "Have I time to read them? Got to get a shower and dress before dinner."

Time or no time, Paul read the letters, an expression of interest deepening on his face as he turned from the first to the second. The clock on the bookcase had ticked six minutes into eternity before Paul tossed both epistles into his desk and departed for the bathroom.

Alex Sherman, returning, frowned at the disorder of the unoccupied study. It was a pleasant apartment with a southern exposure and a fine view over the river to the distant hills. Just now, the sun was lighting them with a glory that held Alex's attention. He was a tall, well-built fellow of seventeen, with heavy brown hair and beautiful brown eyes, their soft vel-

vety look due, unfortunately, to pronounced astigmatism. Not particularly good-looking, he was distinctly *good* looking, a quiet, pleasant fellow, liked by all the boys at St. Stephen's, but perhaps thoroughly appreciated only by those who knew him best. Why he and brilliant, clever Paul Arnold, captain of the eleven, leader of the Glee Club, House-president of Foster, and easily one of the most popular and admired students in school, had been room-mates and friends ever since they met as little boys in the "Nursery," was a matter of interest to many. But to Dr. Hilton, the principal, to the faculty in general, and to those of their class who knew both well, the arrangement seemed natural.

Alex was still watching the sunset when Paul reëntered, less tempestuously this time, but still in haste. To dress fully and present an immaculate and unruffled exterior for dinner inside of seven minutes might seem difficult to the uninitiated, but Paul could do it with ease. At present, he was hurrying too much for speech, but just as he reached the stage of pumps and necktie, Alex turned from the window, casting a critical and disapproving glance into Paul's bedroom.

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"Oh, I know my room looks like destruction!" said Paul. "But I am in a hurry."

"You always are," commented Alex with the dispassionate tone of one who merely looks on. "I know your moral character is irreproachable, but you haven't much sense of time and none at all of order. At least," he added, "till I took you in hand. Really, Paul, I'd rather room with a tidy sinner than a messy saint."

Paul smiled again as he settled the obstinate tie and looked into the mirror to see whether his hair was smooth. Then he turned to gather the scattered garments so disturbing to Alex's peace of mind.

"Dinner is late," he observed, as he hustled the padded trousers and worn jersey into a closet, and came out into the study. "Bet you anything you like that you can't guess what news I've had."

"Uncle's struck a gold mine. Mother's coming north for the winter," observed Alex lazily.

"Neither. Wish it was. Well, there were letters from them both, and the Imp is coming here to school."

"What? Archer? Now?" inquired Alex, startled out of his usual calm.

“There’ll be something doing at St. Stephen’s when the Imp strikes it,” Paul went on. “I don’t know what has precipitated this. The plan was for him to come next fall so as to be here the last year before I went to college. He’s only nine, and that’s rather young, it seems to me. Mother’s letter is a bit tearful and incoherent, but I reckon Archer has been too much for her, and Uncle Court has set his foot down. He does sometimes. Poor Mother! It was hard on her to be left with two boys to bring up. Her letter is chiefly filled with charges to me to look after Archer.”

Alex grinned. “From all I’ve ever heard of your young brother, you’ll have your hands full. But he’ll be down at the Nursery. You won’t have much chance to look after him.”

“Not to the extent of seeing that he puts on his rubbers and cleans his teeth and says his prayers,” Paul agreed.

“I reckon it’s time that kid went to school,” observed Alex gravely.

“I’m sorry for the matron of the Nursery and still sorrier for the master in charge,” Paul continued. “It’s Pomeroy, isn’t it? He’ll have gray hair inside of six weeks.”

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“I'd like to see the fun,” replied Alex. “That picture you have of Archer shows him as a strayed-angel kind of child. I fear, St. Paul, you malign him by calling him Imp.”

“You ought to see a picture Mother has of Archer in his surplice. No strayed angel in it with him. He's your ‘young-eyed cherub’ fast enough. And the queer part is that Archer honestly is angelic,—sometimes! He's just plain daffy over music and he certainly can sing. But at other times, I believe the Imp could give twenty points to the original holy terror and then beat him with one hand tied behind his back.”

“It's tough on your mother,” said Alex. “I suppose he seems just a little chap to her.”

“I wonder what he did,” mused Paul. “Mother doesn't explain at all, just says Uncle Court thinks it better for Archer to come this autumn instead of next year, even though he is three weeks late, and then goes on to beg me not to let the boys tease him and to see that he does and doesn't do all sorts of things.”

“But your uncle wrote. Doesn't he say why the kid's to come?”

“Not exactly.” Paul reached for the letter as he spoke. “This is what he says:

“I have advised your mother to send Archer to St. Stephen’s at once. He is too much for her to manage and ought to be with other and older boys. Of course, he is very young, but your being there makes a great difference. He needs to learn a number of things and the sooner he learns them the better. Now, don’t coddle him. Give him what help and advice he needs and keep your eye on him generally, but let him stand on his own feet and make his own way. Above all, if he gets into scrapes, as of course he will, let him take the consequences. Archer has good stuff in him and he will evolve all right in time, but it will be better for your mother if the process takes place at a distance.”

“Your mother’s counsel and that of your uncle seem rather contradictory,” observed Alex in amusement. “And what declareth the wisdom of St. Paul?”

“The Imp will jolly well paddle his own canoe. If he upsets it, I’ll pull him out, but he can take his chances with the other youngsters. He’s a comical kid and I rather think they’ll take to him. There’s that bell at last!”

CHAPTER II

ARCHER

ON the afternoon his brother was to arrive, Paul went to Boston. The express was late and he had a chance to cool his heels on the platform for half an hour before it was signaled.

“Didn’t know I should be so glad to see the Imp,” he thought, conscious of a curious little feeling of expectancy as the long line of sleepers pulled in and the powerful engine came to a stand at the end of its weary journey. “Hope he got on all right. He’s sort of a little kid to come so far alone.”

Paul stood watching the descending passengers and presently saw a familiar small person, accompanied by a porter carrying a suit-case. That was the Imp fast enough! Nobody else had such an erect, lithe little figure, such an absurdly cherubic face, such big blue eyes, such a mop of curly yellow hair! The next moment

Archer saw his tall brother and a delighted grin spread over his countenance. Paul felt a little choke in his own throat and, to his surprise, not only didn't mind Archer's impetuous embrace, but hugged the Imp as heartily in return.

"I'm awfully glad to see you, Paul!" said Archer happily. "Where do we go now?"

"Oh, we'll get your trunk and take a cab to the other station. Tired? Had a good trip?"

"Yes," replied Archer. "But I'm glad to get here. Is it far to St. Stephen's?"

"We'll be there in another hour. Just take that case to a cab and hold it for me," said Paul, turning to the porter. "Let me have your trunk check."

Archer produced it. "That's a very nice colored man," he observed, indicating the grinning porter. "He's 'most as nice as our Henry."

The mention of the colored butler sent a flood of eager questions to Paul's lips but he repressed them and attended to the necessary transfer. Not until they were seated in the Riverview train from the North Station did he feel at liberty to begin.

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“Now, tell me how Mother is,” he commanded.

“Oh, she’s well and sent you lots of love,” replied his brother, gazing from the window. “So did Uncle Court. What’s that?”

“Bunker Hill Monument,” replied Paul rather absently, for he was looking critically at Archer. There was a strong family resemblance between the brothers, perhaps accentuated by their different coloring. Paul’s steady eyes were gray and had a fashion of meeting those of other people most simply and frankly. His brown hair was brushed back from a fine forehead and his lips, though quick to smile, already shut in lines expressive of character and purpose.

Archer was tall for his age and still possessed his childish grace of motion. Some accident in early childhood had left a faint little scar on a line with and slightly higher than the left corner of his mouth. This gave him the appearance of always smiling, even when perfectly grave. The curious one-sided smile disappeared when the lips relaxed into genuine mirth, but Archer’s mouth in repose possessed a singularly sweet and innocent expression,

which frequently belied the mischievous look in his eyes. Never journeyed a youth of more seraphic visage to the shrine of St. Stephen's.

Paul observed him searchingly, noting, that thanks to the "very nice colored man," who had brushed his suit and suggested a clean collar, Archer looked well-groomed even after a night on the sleeper.

"Now, tell me what you did," said Paul when Bunker Hill Monument had flashed behind them.

"What I did?" inquired Archer, turning from the window. "What makes you think I did anything?"

"Because Uncle Court wouldn't have sent you here red-hot, so to speak, if you hadn't done something. What was it?"

Archer considered. Paul was invariably kind to him, often even affectionate. Friendly relations had always existed between them.

"Well, I suppose I might as well tell you," he remarked candidly. "I got tired of going to a school where there were girls, so I didn't go."

"Played hookey? Was that all?"

"Not exactly," admitted Archer. "I stayed away one morning and had a peach of a time

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with a fellow I know. He is a nice fellow. His father drives a coal cart."

"Oh, does he!" remarked Paul. "Well, what did you and he do?"

"We went swimming that morning. The next day, we thought we'd go again, and we stayed so long that I didn't get home in time for lunch. I had some money, so we went to a place where you can get a whole dinner for ten cents. Jim liked it, but I didn't, not very much. It was so late then that I thought I might just as well not go back until night, so we went to the park and saw the monkeys. Then Jim went home, 'cause he said his mother would tan his hide if he didn't. I was going home, too, but on the way I went by a church where there was some music. There wasn't anybody in the church, only the organist playing, so I sat down to listen. Oh, he could play, Paul! I stayed a long time, and I suppose I went to sleep for the first I knew, it was some time the next day. I guessed I'd better go home, so I climbed out a window and went."

"You young sinner!" growled Paul.

"Ow! you tickle," remonstrated Archer, for three fingers of his brother's hand had gone

down inside his collar. "Well, I went home and when I got in, Mother gave a scream and grabbed me and began to cry. Uncle Court was telephoning and when he saw me, he dropped the receiver and said a very bad word. I know it was bad because I said it once and Mother washed my mouth out with soap."

"You ought to have been licked," commented Paul.

"I guess the only reason Uncle didn't lick me was because Mother wouldn't let go of me long enough so he could," admitted Archer frankly. "That was what happened. They gave me some breakfast, and Uncle Court came back that evening and talked a long time with Mother. Then they sent a lot of telegrams, and got some, too."

"Didn't Uncle Court take you in hand at all, you scamp?" demanded Paul.

"Oh, yes, he said some things to me," Archer replied. "I truly didn't mean to frighten Mother so, and of course I didn't know they were sitting up all night when I was asleep in a church just down the street. They found out I hadn't been to school and they didn't like that, either. Uncle Court came up to my room after

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I was in bed and told me I was to go to St. Stephen's right away. I was glad, Paul."

"I hope he said more than that to you. You deserved a lecture. It was dreadful to frighten Mother so."

"That was an accident. I didn't mean to stay away all night, and Uncle Court knew I didn't. He talked some about school and how proud he and Mother are of you. Paul, I wish you'd change names with me."

"What on earth do you mean, Imp?" asked Paul, genuinely puzzled.

"Because it's a terrible responsibility to be named Archer. It's Father's name, you know, and Uncle Court says they gave it to me, expecting I would keep it as honorable a name as he did, and that I haven't any right ever to do anything to disgrace it. And I'm afraid I shall without knowing it, so I wish you'd change with me."

"Well, I can't, you know," said Paul kindly. "I should think it would be a help to remember how much people honor Father's memory and that the second Archer Arnold must live up to the obligations of his name."

"It isn't!" sighed Archer. "That's all I

did, truly, Paul. And the next day, Uncle Court took me down town and was going to buy me a football suit but I didn't want it."

"Not want it? Don't you want to play football?"

"No, I don't think I do. I feel sure I don't. But Uncle said if I changed my mind, you could get me one. And he bought me a dandy new tennis racquet and some pajamas 'cause I wanted them like yours, and Mother would never let me have anything but long nightgowns that I hate. But Uncle got them and asked if I wanted anything else. I said a piano, but he thought not yet. And then I suggested a canoe, but he said I couldn't have that, either. You have one."

"Yes, and I'll take you out. There are boats belonging to the school and after Dr. Cary is satisfied you can swim well enough, you will be allowed to use them. You're too young to have a canoe. Only the Upper School may have those."

"I'm glad you're here now, Paul," said Archer with the smile that charmed all who came in contact with him. "And can I room with you?"

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His brother shook his head. "You'll have to go down in Clarke House with the other small chaps. We call it the Nursery. There are a jolly lot there, about twenty boys, and they have nice times."

"Can't I ever see you?"

"Oh, yes, of course. You can come to my room any time you like. I'm pretty busy, with studying, athletics, and everything, so you mustn't expect to see a great deal of me. But you'll see me in chapel, and I'll always be where you can get me if you need me."

"Who will be my room-mate?" inquired Archer with rising curiosity.

"You're going to be put in with a nice kid. He's new this term, but he's a jolly little chap and Dr. Hilton thought you two would hit it off together. His name is Bryan Bellew, but the fellows call him Boy Blue."

"That sounds interesting," said Archer. "I guess I'll like him."

"I think you will. And see here, Imp, you want to make friends with the chaps in your house. That's why they are put together. And some of them will be in school as long as you are. You see, don't you? Mrs. Holmes is

the matron at the Nursery and she is a good sort. The master in charge is Pomeroy and he's white, too. And, Archer, don't get into any more scrapes than you can help, but when you do find yourself in a fix, just own up. They don't expect us to be perfect here, but they do expect a fellow to be strictly above board."

"Paul, I'm going to be good. I told Uncle Court I would," said Archer sweetly.

"I know you mean to be, old chap, but I know your ideas of goodness. Look, you can see the sky-line of St. Stephen's now. See, on the hill, there."

Archer turned eager eyes on the towers and spire silhouetted against the clouds, and pressed his face against the pane until the train swept into the station and came to a pause with a grinding of brakes. He was silent during the drive of a mile, listening intently to Paul's remarks as they traversed the main street of the village.

"That's the bookstore there. That's the Grub Shop. We'll go and have ice-cream soon. That's the Salter House. Hello, Al! That fellow is the captain of the nine. This next house is Sanderson. The one over there is

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Foster; that's where I room. This little low building is the office. That's the library, and the gym across. Here we are!"

The cab turned down a drive and came to a stand before a rather battered brick building. Its lines were impressive and the architecture good, but curtains rolled askew and windows open at all angles detracted somewhat from the dignity of its appearance. Half a dozen small boys were playing ball on the green before its door, but the game came to an abrupt conclusion as the cab drew up. When Paul stepped out, the entire group of players stiffened into attitudes of admiring attention, for each and every one of them secretly adored Arnold as a shining and inaccessible light in the school world. Their admiration was mingled with interest as Archer followed.

"Hello," said Paul, beckoning to the nearest. "Is Mrs. Holmes in, do you know?"

"She's in her sitting-room," replied the boy eagerly. "I'll call her."

"Mrs. Holmes, this is my brother, Archer," said Paul a moment later.

"I'm very glad to have you here," said Mrs. Holmes, shaking hands with Archer. "It isn't

many years since Paul came to Clarke House."

"I'll leave you now, Archer. Mrs. Holmes will tell you what to do, and after dinner I'll come and take you to see the Doctor."

Giving him a farewell slap on the shoulder, Paul dashed off at full speed across the campus. Archer looked after him and then followed Mrs. Holmes. She was a middle-aged woman with a refined face and pleasant voice.

"This is the living-room, Archer, and right behind it is my little sitting-room. I'm always glad to have the boys come to see me and if you don't feel well or anything troubles you, you must come and tell me all about it. I'm used to boys, you see, so I can almost always help them about things. Across the hall, is Mr. Pome-roy's study and his bedroom. The dining-room is this way."

Archer had paused, looking around the living-room, a sunny, homelike place, with a big open hearth, decked now with feathery bunches of asparagus, but suggestive of jolly fires on cold winter nights. The furniture was battered but substantial and the room gave an impression of having seen many festive times. In one corner stood a small piano.

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“Oh, can the fellows use that?” Archer asked eagerly as his eyes fell on the instrument.

“Why, yes, it is for them,” replied Mrs. Holmes in surprise, for in all her fifteen years’ experience with small boys at Clarke House, this was the first time such inquiry had been made.

Upstairs were double rooms and baths and on the third floor a similar arrangement. Mrs. Holmes preceded Archer down the third story hall toward a door that bore on its exterior the mystic number seven. From its other side came a chorus of boyish voices, stilled at her knock.

CHAPTER III

AT THE NURSERY

THE boy who opened the door in response to the matron's knock was about Archer's age but sturdier and not as tall. He had a round, merry, much-freckled face, shaggy black hair, and blue eyes. Three other occupants of the room promptly rose to their feet at sight of Mrs. Holmes.

"Bryan, this is your new room-mate, Archer Arnold," she said.

Bryan solemnly extended a hand which Archer as solemnly shook.

"He is Paul Arnold's brother, you know," added Mrs. Holmes. "And these are some more of our Clarke House boys. Here are Holbrook Foster and Carl Elliott and Fred Preston."

Each of the boys as mentioned greeted Archer politely and remained staring at him until the matron smilingly commended him to Bryan's care and withdrew.

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"Say, aren't you in luck to be Paul Arnold's brother," remarked Bryan as the door closed.

"Why?" asked Archer.

This innocent query shook number seven to its very foundations. Four small boys gasped with horror.

"Why—why—he's—well, he *is* Arnold, you see," explained Bryan lamely, trying to collect sufficient speech to express his thoughts. "He's such a crackerjack! I should think you'd be awfully proud of him."

Archer stared in return. "I like Paul, of course," he replied, being in real ignorance of the high place accorded his brother in the general estimation of St. Stephen's. "But he's just Paul, you know. Is that the river? Can we go down there?"

"We've got to dress for dinner," explained Bryan. "I'll take you there to-morrow."

"It's a jim-dandy river," volunteered the boy introduced as Holbrook, whose merry eyes betokened a jolly disposition. "Come on, Dutch, we've got to wash up, too. 'By, Boy Blue. 'By, Archer."

The other lads faded from the room, leaving Archer with his room-mate. For a few mo-

ments they continued to examine each other curiously, like two puppies making acquaintance, and then settled down to business.

“That’s your bed,” began Bryan, indicating one of the narrow white iron frames. “And that’s your bureau and your closet and your desk. The window-seat we have together and I hope you brought some cushions, for I haven’t as many as we need.”

“I guess Mother packed some,” said Archer, feeling rather hazy as to what was in his trunk. The next minute he wished he hadn’t mentioned his mother, for a sudden vision of her dear face blotted all the late sunshine from the room and made everything seem indescribably bare and barren.

“And pictures, too,” went on Bryan, quite unconscious of this state of affairs. “We could use a lot more. But we’d better get ready for dinner. You can wash first,” he added, indicating the set-bowl in a little alcove.

Archer choked back a sob and turned to his suit-case. Bryan chattered merrily on, not noticing his companion’s silence.

“Do you play footer? I’m trying for the Lower school eleven, but lots of the fellows go

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in for running and tennis. We have dandy courts and the Upper school can't play on them, either. Here, I'll lend you a towel."

Applications of cold water and another fresh collar added much to Archer's personal comfort and he followed Bryan to the dining-room with renewed interest. The hall was full of chattering boys from ten to twelve or thirteen. All were in dark suits and most of them wore broad Eton collars and soft ties like Archer's, but one or two of the older ones had assumed the standing collar and maturer cravat of boyhood. Bryan introduced Archer to Mr. Pomeroy, a tall, thin man who seemed fearsomely old to Archer. Later, he learned that "Pummy" was popularly supposed to possess a record of one hundred and eight years. As a matter of fact, he was scarcely thirty. He had keen hazel eyes, and a rather stern mouth, which could relax into a pleasant smile. He smiled at Archer now and said: "Paul's brother? We're glad indeed to have another boy from the Arnold family."

The dining-room contained two long tables, each seating twelve. Over one Mrs. Holmes presided and Mr. Pomeroy over the other. Ar-

cher found himself at the matron's left hand with Bryan next.

The boys at his table interested him so much that he almost forgot to eat, though he was hungry and the dinner good. Directly opposite sat a boy so exceedingly fat that his clothes literally creased around the folds of his plump person. His thick eyebrows were almost concealed between rolls of skin but had a curious and disconcerting trick of emerging from their lair in a manner that Archer found fascinating. This boy was George Morrison, generally known as "Skinny." Beyond, sat "Fatty," a youth in almost the opposite extreme of thinness. Next, sat a lad to whom Archer instantly felt attracted, a round-faced boy with brown eyes and hair, whom everybody called Tommy.

Conversation was gay and apparently quite unrestrained, but Archer was unable to attach all the names he heard to their proper owners, and confined his own part in the merry talk to a few questions to Bryan. After dinner, the "Nursery" gathered in the living-room to listen to a short and simple evening service of prayer and hymn.

"Don't you sing, Archer? Don't you know

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this hymn?" asked Mrs. Holmes softly, noticing that he did not join in the music.

Archer choked. Sing? He couldn't! Why, he had known that evening hymn all his short life. It was all he could bear to hear anybody sing it to-night.

"We always have prayers right after dinner," explained Bryan, when the service was over. "The other houses have them later. Now, we can do what we like until eight and then we have to go to bed. I've got to do my arithmetic because I didn't do it this afternoon in school. The big fellows have an evening study hour, but we are supposed to do all our work in the schoolroom. Wouldn't you like to visit Polly and Dutch?"

Archer didn't care about any more new experiences just then, though both "Polly" and "Dutch" gave him a cordial invitation. But before he could either accept or decline, a quick step sounded on the walk and Paul came in. His appearance had the effect of a bomb on the little group on the stairs.

"Come along, Archer!" he called. "Never mind your cap,—you don't need one. Good evening, Mr. Pomeroy. I just came to take Archer

over to see Dr. Hilton, if I may. He hasn't been there yet."

"Glad to see you, Paul. Certainly, take him along, but don't keep him late."

Archer gladly followed his brother into the soft darkness of the autumn night.

"How goes it, old chap?" asked Paul kindly. "Like Boy Blue?"

"I guess so," said Archer bravely. "There's a lot of it and it's all pretty different, Paul. Is Dr.—Dr. Hilton very awful?"

"Not a bit. He's great! I admire him tremendously and I like him, too. Buck up, Imp! He'll only keep you a minute."

"Do you suppose Uncle Court told him why I was sent now?" begged Archer.

Paul wanted to laugh at this question but realizing that it was a vital matter to the inexperienced little brother, suppressed his amusement.

"I don't know whether he did or didn't, but it won't make the slightest difference either way. You're starting with a perfectly clean slate. It doesn't matter what you did before you came."

Archer's concern was lost in amazement at

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sight of the campus, its scattered buildings outlined by lights. Shadowy forms were passing here and there, cheery greetings called from one to another, snatches of song far and near came in little bursts of melody. Not a few boys hailed Paul in passing and received responses. A queer mysterious feeling began to possess Archer. It was a great school! And it was his school now, as well as Paul's.

They stopped at the pretty, vine-covered office building and Paul entered a room at the right, evidently an ante-room, for he immediately crossed to knock at another door.

"May we come in, Dr. Hilton?" he asked, in response to an invitation to enter. "I've brought my brother."

Archer stared at the tall, clean-shaven man in clerical costume who rose to receive them and was struck dumb with embarrassment as he shook hands.

"I'm glad to see you, Archer," said a pleasant, low voice. "We have spoken of the time when we should have you here."

Paul looked with some amusement at the Imp. Never had Archer appeared more angelic! His cheeks were pink with excitement and his curly

yellow hair slightly ruffled. He looked just what he was, a thoroughly nice, well-brought-up little fellow whose mother was probably inconsolable to-night at having launched him into a school of big, rough boys.

"Sit down a minute, Archer," said Dr. Hilton.

"I'll wait for you in the other room," remarked Paul, promptly disappearing. Archer, with a helpless glance after him, seated himself on the very edge of a slippery chair. Dr. Hilton did not appear to notice his embarrassment.

"Paul tells me that you are even more musical than he is. We've a place for you right now in our choir. Mr. Carter plays the organ and is choirmaster. We are proud of our music. Do you play as well as sing?"

"Yes, sir, a little," replied Archer, responding to the note Dr. Hilton had so skilfully touched.

"We must plan to have you go into Boston for some of the concerts then. Your uncle wrote that they wished you as well as Paul to have musical advantages."

Archer's eyes fell. What else had Uncle Court said?

“Now, next to music, what do you like best?” went on Dr. Hilton. “We expect all our boys to go in for some sport, football or baseball, tennis, basketball, soccer,—anything they choose, but it must be something. I hardly suppose you like football as well as Paul does, do you?”

“I like tennis better,” said Archer shyly.

“That’s good!” said Dr. Hilton. “There are several really fine players among the younger boys. You’ll find plenty of fellows ready to challenge you. Now, Archer, we haven’t many rules here, and we understand that it is sometimes hard for the boys to keep even those. I hope you won’t break any, but if you do, we expect you to tell us just how it happened and then take the penalty cheerfully. We want to be as proud of you as we are of Paul.”

Dr. Hilton, who had talked with hundreds of attractive lads, was suddenly struck by the charming smile that lighted the little face before him.

“I’m glad Paul belongs to me,” said Archer simply. “He’s mine more than anybody’s, ’cept just Mother.”

“Well, try to make Paul feel that way about you, too,” replied the principal, smiling in reply, but looking rather wonderingly at this small boy who certainly seemed possessed of a most distinct personality. “Paul’s good opinion is worth having. Now, that’s all, Archer. Good-night. I hope you’ll be happy here and you will be if you do your best, and I’m sure you’re going to try.”

“You didn’t find the Doctor so very bad, did you, old chap?” asked Paul as the two went out again into the night.

“N-no,” admitted Archer, “but I’d be scared of him if I’d done things I ought not to. I guess he could be pretty awful. May I come to your room with you now?”

“There isn’t time to-night. The bell will ring very soon. It rings at ten minutes to eight, and at eight every fellow has to report in his house unless he has permission to be out later. I’ll look for you in chapel to-morrow. You’ll see me down in front toward the right. Now, there’s Clarke over there.”

“I wish you’d wait a minute,” gasped Archer. “I feel very queer. I don’t believe I’m well.”

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“What’s the matter? Did you eat any stuff on the train that you shouldn’t?”

“Oh, no, I didn’t! It’s my—my throat, Paul. It’s all queer and very choky.”

Paul suddenly sat down on a stone wall. “Oh, Archer,” he groaned, “you don’t mean to say you’re homesick?”

“I don’t know!” said Archer with a gulp. “Things are different and it’s so big and so many people. I’m only used to Mother and me and sometimes you. *Am* I homesick, Paul?”

“It’s up to you to get a brace on yourself,” said Paul firmly. “Of course, everything is strange and it’s not like home. But you wanted to come and you’ll soon like it. Great Scott, what am I going to do?” he ended with a vague question of the surrounding darkness.

“Oh, well, if that’s what it is, I’ll probably get over it,” said Archer philosophically. “I thought I was sick. I won’t make a fuss, Paul. Only Mother always tucks me into bed and says her prayers with me. Doesn’t she tuck you in, too, when you’re home?”

“She always comes to see me after I’ve gone to bed,” said Paul gently. “You must expect to miss Mother. I miss her, too, but the only

thing is to be brave about it, Archer. And I think she is lonesome to-night, as well as you. There's the bell! Report to Mr. Pomeroy that you've come in. Now, Archer, if you're going to be homesick, I'll—I'll come over and spank you!" he ended in desperation.

"That would be pretty funny," said Archer, laughing, but still with an evident lump in his throat. "I guess I won't mind so much when it isn't dark. Good-night, Paul."

Paul waited until the slender little figure vanished into the yawning doorway of the Nursery and then walked briskly toward Foster. Not during prayers nor when he and Alex settled themselves for the study hour following, did a puzzled expression leave his face.

"Archer homesick?" asked Alex, looking up at length from a Latin dictionary.

Paul's level eyes met his across the table. "How did you guess?"

"Mind-reading," said Alex gravely. "Poor little beggar! I know how he feels."

"I guess it's 'poor Mother' too," said Paul, half-laughing. "Archer is such a little chap after all, and he's used to her gentle ways and to being petted. It is hard. The worst of it is

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that Mother will be horrified at the things he'll learn, not realizing that he's got to learn them before he can get much farther. Yes, it's decidedly 'poor Mother'!"

CHAPTER IV

INTRODUCING PATSY CHASE

PAUL's intention was of the best. He really meant to look after his little brother's happiness, but as it chanced, Paul was having troubles of his own. He saw Archer's curly head across the chapel next morning and smiled a greeting, but when the boys swarmed out and scattered for recitations, he lost sight of his brother and did not find him during the few moments at his disposal. Paul was carrying a heavy schedule and trying to do such a number of outside things that time and strength were both taxed to the utmost. He had no spare moments until he came in after football practice that afternoon. Alex came up to dress at the same time and soon noticed his room-mate's preoccupation.

"What's up?" he inquired briefly, sure of an answer, for he and Paul had built their friendship on a firm foundation and were given to sharing each other's burdens.

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“Patterson!” commented Paul as concisely.

Alex nodded. “I was afraid you’d have trouble with him. He’s not got over your winning out as captain of the team last fall.”

“I wish he hadn’t chosen to come out this year,” said Paul thoughtfully. “He took the election all right at the time and even congratulated me. Like a ninny, I took it for granted things would go smoothly. And in a way they do. I can’t put my finger on a single thing he does, only the team doesn’t get together and I feel sure it’s due to Patterson.”

“Patterson plays center, doesn’t he? Can’t you put him on the second eleven?”

Paul stared. “But I can’t fire a fellow when there’s nothing definite he does.”

“Keep your eye peeled and I reckon you’ll find a reason,” observed Alex laconically.

“Won’t do. Patterson has a certain following and there would be the biggest kind of a row. All the same, I would drop him and I will, if he actually does anything. But it is discouraging. There’s good stuff in that team, but play together they will not! Jacobs has got it in for Nichols, and Penrose hates Church like poison, and they won’t drop their private

grudges and play for the school. Patterson hangs back and though he obeys orders, he does it in a way that makes me want to lick him."

"Doesn't Bridges help out?"

"Bridges says it's my own business to keep discipline on the team—he's the coach. And he's right. It is up to the captain. I've about made up my mind to tell the fellows what I think of them."

"Good idea! I would," said Alex cordially. "You'll have to sooner or later and you might as well do it and have it over. As for Patterson, I know something of him on the board of the 'Inkstand' and he's a fellow you want to watch."

"I've always hated his slick ways," grumbled Paul. "Queer how he can sling the butter, though. I'll bet there's hardly a chap who stands more in with the faculty. Thankful he doesn't room in Foster. By the way, somebody told me that Patterson is going in for the Chase prize."

"Glad he didn't compete last year. Patterson can sling the ink as well as soft soap. I wouldn't have had such a walkover. Paul, I want you to get it this time."

“Well, I want it,—largely to win out again from Patterson,” said Paul frankly. “Say, I haven’t seen that kid brother of mine since chapel.”

“Archer’s all right. I went past Clarke and saw him playing tennis with Boy Blue, and putting up a good game, too. Archer’s a cute kid.”

“Yes, he is that,” admitted Paul. “I suppose he’ll be as tough as they make them in another six months. But after that stage, he’ll amount to something.”

“He’s a friendly little chap,” went on Alex. “The fellows seem to like him, so I reckon you needn’t worry.”

“Can’t see him this evening with that debate on,” said Paul. “I must make time to look him up to-morrow.”

Archer was in fact “all right,” and after that first attack of homesickness had not felt lonely. But, as it chanced, Paul did not exchange more than a few words with him until Saturday afternoon. As he and Alex came from their last recitation of the morning, they met Archer in the path to Foster.

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"Hello there!" called Paul cheerily. "How goes it?"

"Pretty well, I guess," replied Archer. "Mayn't I come with you this afternoon?"

"Why I'm going to play footer. Come down and watch if you like."

Archer wasn't particularly interested in football, but he thought he should like to see Paul play.

"Perhaps I could come to your room after dinner?" he suggested politely.

"Sure! Come as early as you can."

Archer lingered. "May I bring a friend?" he inquired.

Paul hesitated. He did not care to have the Nursery kids overrun his always popular study, but it was clearly his duty to see what kind of chaps Archer got in with. "Who's your friend?" he inquired.

"His name is Patsy Chase. I like him very much and I want you to meet him."

"Chase? Chase?" queried Paul. "I don't know any kid of that name. Well, bring him along."

Football went better that afternoon. The

second eleven gave the first a contest exciting enough to down private prejudices and bring about something nearer team work than had previously been the case. Paul caught sight of Archer among the spectators, watching him with wide open and horrified blue eyes. Toward the end of the practice period, a sudden downpour of rain scattered the onlookers and the first eleven won a muddy but unwitnessed triumph.

The "crowd" had collected in Study 18 that evening, half a dozen good cronies, all lads of the fifth or sixth form. Alex had built a fire in the small grate and marshmallows were being toasted. Close-drawn curtains emphasized the contrast between the rain outside and the pleasant warmth and light within. In the midst of the festivities came a knock.

"Come in!" called Alex.

The door opened to admit Archer's yellow head. Clad in a dripping "slicker" he stood on the threshold, somewhat abashed at sight of the room full of boys.

"Oh, come in, we're glad to see you!" said Alex cordially, and Paul peered through the assemblage from his seat on the hearth-rug.

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“Is that you, Imp? Thought it would be too rainy. Just dump your slicker outside.”

Archer complied and came in with the easy grace that distinguished his every motion.

“Here’s a cushion to sit on, old chap,” said Paul. “This is my brother, fellows. Archer, this is the crowd. You’ll have to sort them out for yourself.”

Archer smiled shyly at the “crowd” and the crowd to a man returned the greeting. They made way for him to reach the fire and provided him with a stick and a marshmallow. He subsided silently upon a sofa pillow in the shadow of the fireplace, listening quietly to the talk that went on. It was of athletics and matters of general school interest he knew little about, but it was Paul’s world. Moreover, Archer liked men and big boys. As a rule, he found them friendly. He sat on the cushion, toasting and eating marshmallows, and occasionally glancing at the side pocket of his coat, which seemed to be slightly agitated.

“Too hot?” asked Alex, leaning from behind him. “Come, perch on the arm of my chair.”

“It’s not too hot for me,” observed Archer, but as he spoke, he withdrew from the fire.

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"Thought you were going to bring a friend," said Paul suddenly, as his brother's movement recalled him to mind.

"I brought him," replied Archer.

"You did? Where is he? Have you left him outside all this time? Pops, open that door, will you? Why didn't you bring him in?"

"I did," said Archer, producing from his pocket a small and fluffy kitten in a high state of indignation. "This is Patsy Chase."

A roar went up from the crowd and the frightened kitten clawed its way up Archer's coat to a refuge under his collar.

"Archer, you scamp, where did you swipe that little cat?" demanded Paul as the merri-ment subsided.

"I didn't swipe him. He belongs to me."

"What do you mean?" asked the amused Alex. "Does Mrs. Holmes let you have him?"

"Of course she does," replied Archer. "She likes my friend. All the fellows like him. There is be an extra pint of milk every day for him."

"Where did you unearth him?" inquired Preston Lawrence, otherwise known as "Pops."

"Down that street where there are so many



"THIS IS PATSY CHASE."—Page 52.

big white houses. There is one that has a lovely garden. The lady who lives there gave him to me. Mrs. Holmes says she is Madam Chase, and so I named him Paderewski Chase, Patsy for short."

Archer's simple statement caused a distinct sensation. "Madam Chase!" gasped more than one surprised voice.

"Archer, what fresh thing have you been up to?" demanded Paul. "Madam Chase, of all people! How did she happen to give it to you?"

"I was walking by the house and the kitten was inside the garden," explained Archer. "I spoke to it, and it came out to speak with me. Then it wouldn't go back. So I opened the gate and took it in. I was going to leave it, but I saw some flowers I never saw before so I stopped to look at them, and then I looked at all the flowers. By and by I met an old lady with very white hair and I asked her what the things were that looked like pansies but weren't. She told me. They are violas and they have faces like pansies, but spurs like violets. We talked quite a while and walked about the garden. She asked me to come into the house, so I did

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and we talked about music. She has a beautiful grand piano. She let me play on it and I sang for her. Then she said I might have the kitten if Mrs. Holmes would let me. And she has invited me to come and have tea with her to-morrow."

The silence that attended this simple tale was marked and flattering. Madam Chase, for whose son the gymnasium and library were memorials, whose generosity provided the prize of which Paul had been speaking, but who never set foot inside the school buildings and who was popularly reported to be unable to endure the sight of any boy, particularly small ones!

"Archer Arnold!" said Pops solemnly. "Without doubt, you are the original and only eighth wonder of the world!"

"What *are* you going to do next?" inquired Paul. "Madam Chase and Mrs. Holmes and a kitten at Clarke! What have you done with Pomeroy?"

"I didn't think I was going to like him," Archer replied calmly. "There's a scuttle place where you can go up to the roof, so Bryan and I went through to see what was be-

yond. Mr. Pomeroy came up after us and at first he felt quite excited, but when he saw what a nice flat place it was, he rather liked it himself, and he let us all go up last night. It has a railing, you know, and we stayed up there and the stars came overhead and it was like a pirate ship. But we mustn't go up unless he goes with us."

"You'll do!" laughed Pops above the general amusement. "Paul, why didn't you tell us what you were springing on us? Will you sing for us, Archer? Somebody get a guitar."

"Yes, go ahead, Imp," said Paul. "Sing them the 'Last Chantey.'"

Archer hesitated. He could scarcely remember the time when he began to sing in the boy choir at home, but singing for a room full of strange fellows was different. Still, he would do anything for Paul. He shyly took the guitar thrust upon him and touched its vibrant strings.

"Thus said the Lord in the vault above the cherubim,
 Calling to the angels and souls in their degree,
 'Lo! earth hath passed away in the smoke of Judgment
 Day,
 That Our word may be established, shall We gather up the
 sea?' "

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The room was breathlessly still. Only Patsy, wandering afield, clawed his way up a trouser-leg and was absently assisted and petted by a big hand more used to wielding a bat. Archer's voice was a clear, true soprano, as pure and fresh as a bird song. It had been very carefully trained by a choirmaster who knew what an unusual treasure he was handling. Steps paused outside Paul's room and the door was noiselessly unlatched.

"Then said the Angel of the Off-shore Wind,"

came the sweet notes. Study doors across the hall opened and soft footsteps emerged. Heads appeared in the doorway of Study 18. Archer sang on unconsciously.

"And we drowsed the long tides idle, till Thy trumpets
tore the sea,"

he went on amid the perfect silence reigning throughout the whole second floor of Foster. As the last clear notes died away, a roar of applause went up that fairly frightened Archer and for the first time made him aware of the size of his audience. With a startled glance at Paul, he suddenly withdrew into the darkness of the corner.

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The boys had the sense to appreciate Archer's sensitive shyness and the kindness not to ask him to sing again, though all wanted to hear him. With true delicacy, they only made laughing and merry remarks of thanks, and presently drifted away, leaving the occupants of Study 18 alone. Not until they were gone, did Archer emerge from the shadow of the curtain.

"Imp, you're a brick!" said Paul kindly. "That was good of you and the fellows liked you for it. But come, tell me what you've done with yourself all the week, besides bewitching Madam Chase and annexing Patsy?"

Archer looked half doubtfully toward Alex, whose glasses were bent upon him across the table.

"Oh, nothing much," he explained. "I played tennis quite a little with Boy Blue and Tommy. I like Tommy. And I went into the chapel when I heard the organ. I like the man who plays it."

"Mr. Carter? Did you scrape acquaintance with him?"

"I went to hear him play, and of course we spoke to each other," said Archer candidly.

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"I want to play the organ, too, but he says my hands aren't big enough. He is going to give me a piano lesson on Monday and I am to be in the choir to-morrow. And every Wednesday afternoon there will be an organ recital at five o'clock. I shall go to hear them."

Archer had edged nearer and nearer his brother, and at the last sentence, insinuated his small person within Paul's arm. Paul looked sheepishly at Alex, but met by a wholly approving and uncritical smile, did not repulse the invader.

"And how do you like Boy Blue?" he asked.

"Bryan is pretty funny," laughed Archer. "He had the toothache this afternoon and he went to bed and said he was dying. We all stood around to see him do it, but Skinny ran and told Mrs. Holmes and she came flying upstairs. When she found he wasn't truly dying, she made him get straight up and dress and took him down to the village to the dentist. Bryan is mad with Skinny and says he'll teach him to butt into his death-bed again."

"Skinny should certainly have his head punched," said Alex gravely. "How go the lessons, Kid?"

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"I think they're easy," said Archer. "I had all my examples right every day so far. What's that paper there?"

"My geometry," replied Paul.

"It looks something fierce!" commented Archer frankly. "I wouldn't like that."

"Been homesick again?" inquired his brother.

"I haven't told anybody if I was. Tommy says he was so homesick when he came that Mrs. Holmes had to hold his hand for three nights until he went to sleep. That was pretty bad!"

"Yes, that was," agreed Paul. "Archer, you ought to go, for the ten-minute bell will ring right away. It was dandy of you to sing for the crowd. Come again, any time you can."

"Yes, do," said Alex. "I'm a forlorn widow when Paul is playing ball. Come and see me, Archer, and bring Patsy Chase with you."

CHAPTER V

THE VOYAGE OF THE *LUCY*

“LOWER school pupils are forbidden to use canoes unless accompanied by a master or by an approved member of the Upper school. Boys in Lower school who have passed the swimming test may use boats. Bounds on the river are Foster’s Mills, downstream, and the railroad bridge, upstream.”

Archer and Boy Blue laboriously spelled out this notice that lovely October afternoon. It hung conspicuously in the boat-house, and further to encourage youth to avoid temptation, Dick, a grizzled old Scotchman, had charge of the place and exercised a shrewd inspection over all boats and canoes that went out.

“And have ye passed the test?” he inquired of the two who applied for the “little boat with the blue oars.” “Then ye’ll be having your names on this list I’m keeping. Arnold, A., Bellew, B. Quite right. Ye may tak’ the wee boatie. Now, remember the bounds. Ye can row, of course?”

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He unfastened the padlock of the *Lucy* and the two scrambled delightedly in. To be styled a "wee boatie" transformed the *Lucy* into a fairy shallop, conveying gallant adventurers to a land of romance. She really was a steady old tub, as canny Dick very well knew, used to being banged into banks and scraped over stones in the shallow river. Side by side each took an oar and the *Lucy* naturally headed downstream.

"This is 'most as much fun as a canoe," said Bryan, charmed with the way the banks were gliding past. "And there weren't any canoes left. The Upper school had pigged every one of them."

"Paul's was there," replied Archer, "but it's chained in the boat-house and he keeps the key. He said he'd take me on Sunday after dinner. You can come, too."

"Why isn't he out this afternoon?" asked Bryan. "Oh, they are playing footer, of course. Pull your oar, Archer. We're going to bunt into the shore."

Archer pulled vigorously; the *Lucy* sheered away from the bank and headed straight across the river for a canoe tied under over-hanging trees. Its occupants, one sprawled flat in the

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bottom, the other sitting in the bow, were busily engaged in reading and eating peanuts.

“Hey, you kids!” exclaimed the boy in the bow. “Pull your starboard oar. We’re no armored cruiser!”

Bryan did his best but the current had the *Lucy* in its grasp. Seizing a paddle, one occupant of the canoe easily fended them off. The boat came harmlessly alongside.

“I’m very sorry. Please excuse us!” gasped Archer, his eyes big with dismay.

“You’re little Gabriel, aren’t you? Heard you sing last Sunday.”

Archer stared. He did not know that the Upper school had promptly rechristened him.

“I’m Archer Arnold,” he said shyly.

Both big boys grinned. “Oh, yes, Gabriel, we know all about you,” said the one in the bow. “Haven’t you two got more than you can manage? Think not? Well, have a peanut and quit jamming us ashore. So long!”

The speaker tossed a handful of nuts into the boat, gave the *Lucy* a vigorous shove, and with a friendly nod returned to his book.

“What is the matter with this old boat?” asked Bryan as the *Lucy* continued her course

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in a strange sidewise manner. "I believe it'll be better to take turns rowing and then one of us can steer."

Archer agreed, for they had almost telescoped another stationary canoe. No peanuts came their way this time, only graphic comments on their oarsmanship.

"I'll move to the stern," he said. "Oh, Boy Blue, there's the smallest turtle baby of all! I've got to have it!"

The infant turtle did not know enough to seek safety farther down in the water; it was moving almost on the surface. Nearly going overboard in his efforts, Archer secured the coveted prize. It was indeed the youngest baby of the family, hardly larger than a five-cent piece. Bryan dropped his oars to share Archer's glee.

"Let's start an aquarium," he proposed. "We can get pollywogs—"

"Ship ahoy! Oh, you kids! Do you want the whole river?"

Two canoes with six gay big boys swept past, splashing water in every direction and rocking from gunwale to gunwale.

"It seems to me this boat takes up a great

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deal of room," said Archer patiently. Their attempt to clear the channel had again bumped them into the bank.

"These oars weigh a good deal," sighed Bryan, looking at his small hands. "Let's drift for a while and plan the aquarium. I guess Mrs. Holmes will let us have a big glass jar. I forgot. There won't be pollywogs this time of year."

"There'll be little fishes, though," said Archer. "Let's watch for a place where it's sandy and shallow and perhaps we can catch some. There's a tin can here in the locker."

Considerable water had slipped under the *Lucy's* keel before a desirable fishing ground appeared. At one side, the river broadened into a wide sunny bayou, showing a golden sandy bottom. Once in this sheltered harbor the boat was wholly out of the current and floated motionless in the shallow water. To the delight of both boys, minnows were present in shoals.

"But if we use the tin can to catch 'em, what'll we put 'em in?" demanded Bryan.

"We'll catch 'em with our handkerchiefs," decided Archer, promptly plunging his under

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water. Before it the little fish fled in alarm. This would never answer.

Archer had no cap but Bryan sacrificed a perfectly new one to the cause of science. At the end of an hour, both boys were splashed and muddy and the tin can contained three hard-caught minnows besides the little turtle.

"It must be 'most time to go back," said Archer.

Bryan consulted a dollar watch, the pride of his heart. It ticked like an alarm clock, its works were apparently completely detached from its case, but it usually indicated somewhere near the correct time.

"Five o'clock. But we're not very far away because we haven't seen the mill."

"No canoes have passed for a long time," said Archer. "I think we'd better start. I'll row going back."

Archer applied himself energetically to the oars and Bryan steered, one eye fixed on the tin can. At the end of ten minutes they were still in sight of the fishing ground.

"I'll row, too," said Bryan. "If there aren't any canoes to bump into, I guess we can do it."

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With two at the oars, the *Lucy* made a little better progress, but oh, how slowly the banks edged past!

"I've been seeing that maple for ever so long," remarked Archer between determined strokes. "What time is it now?"

"Quarter to six," Bryan replied, looking as well at the blisters on his hot little palms.

Archer's hands were blistered also, his arms and shoulders ached, but he was too game to give up. He pulled steadily on.

"Let's stop and rest a minute," suggested Bryan as the *Lucy* in rounding a curve, swung close to the bank. "I'll hold on by this branch."

Archer agreed. He was watching a slender green canoe in the distance, coming easily and so quickly up-stream. Its bow cleared the water, for it had but one occupant, a tall, powerfully built fellow of eighteen. As he approached the boat he scanned it curiously. From afar he had been observing its difficult progress and now he looked at the wet, weary small boys. One was a dark-haired, jolly little fellow he had seen before; the other was the new little chap with the topping voice.

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"You kids are 'way off bounds," he remarked as he came abreast.

The two looked at each other. "Why, we thought a mill was bounds," explained Archer.

"You're a mile below the mill," replied the older boy, holding his canoe stationary in the middle of the stream.

"We are? We didn't see any mill," said Bryan.

"Didn't you see a tumble-down board shanty on the left bank of the river? That was it."

"I thought a mill was a big brick building," said Archer. His grieved and astonished expression would have moved a stone image to pity.

The older boy laughed. "This was a saw-mill and only part of it is left. You're a long way down the river and the current is strong to-day. Hang on tight to that branch and wait a minute."

With two strokes the canoe came alongside. Its occupant laid down his paddle, pulled the painter from the bow and stepped into the boat, permitting the canoe to float astern. He tied the rope to the *Lucy's* thwart.

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"Give me the oars and one of you move up in the bow. You steer," he added, indicating Archer.

"Oh, thank you!" said Archer gratefully. "It's pretty hard work."

"It's awfully good of you, Patterson," said Bryan shyly. He recognized their rescuer, knew him for a sixth-form boy far removed from the orbit of the Nursery.

"This is a beastly old tub, anyway," replied Patterson, with one stroke jerking the *Lucy* half across the river. "Ask next time for the *Cora* or the *Belle*. They are both lighter and easier to handle."

Archer subsided in the stern, his weary little body sinking into relaxed lines. Bryan had the aquarium in charge so he had nothing on his mind but the steering-ropes. Their progress now was a very different matter as under Patterson's strong arms the *Lucy* fairly flew upstream.

There was not much conversation on the way, for Bryan was too shy and Archer too tired to make friendly advances. Nor did either notice that the gaze of the older boy returned again and again to Archer.

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“You’re Arnold’s little brother, I believe,” he remarked as they reached the last bend of the river. “What’s your name?”

Archer told him. “Do you know Paul?” he asked eagerly, his charming smile lighting his face.

“Yes,” said the oarsman rather curtly. His eyes were still fixed, with a curious intensity, on Archer. “What are you going to do with that turtle?” he inquired, indicating the small specimen that Archer was lovingly regarding.

“Keep him in a glass jar. I shall name him Twofer, he’s so tiny. ‘Two for five,’ you know.”

Patterson laughed. “My little sister has an aquarium. You want some snails in it. They eat up the garbage and keep the water clean. You can get them in the shallows upstream a little way.”

“Oh, I’ll go for them some day,” said Archer. “Paul said he’d take me out in his canoe next Sunday. Perhaps we can get them then. I’m glad you know Paul, but everybody seems to.”

Across the handsome, rather sullen face of the older boy came an odd look. He did not speak immediately.

“When you go out again, better row upstream,” he said at length. “Then you have the easy work last, when you’re feeling fagged. And don’t get this old battle-ship palmed off on you. Some of the larger boats are easier to row.”

As he concluded, the *Lucy* reached the pier. Safe on shore, Archer turned to their benefactor.

“Thank you so very much,” he said, offering his hand with the quaint politeness that came so naturally to him.

Patterson stared for a second, then took the extended hand and smiled.

“You’re not exactly what I’d expect Arnold’s brother to be,” he said rather gruffly. “Glad I came across you. Better hustle now, or you’ll be late for dinner.”

CHAPTER VI

ON THE GRIDIRON

WHEN Paul reached the gridiron that same Saturday afternoon, a boy promptly strolled up with a note. Tearing it open, he saw Patterson's signature and above it the bald statement that he was unable to attend practice.

"Is he ill?" asked Paul, turning sharply upon the messenger.

"Well,—I don't know!" said Adams frankly. He was one of the younger boys in the Upper school with whom Patterson was rather friendly in a patronizing way. The note had been given him as he crossed the campus and while he very well knew that the book and towel Patterson carried indicated an afternoon to be spent on and in the river, still Patterson really might not be feeling up to football.

Giving Adams a curt nod of dismissal, Paul crushed the note into a pocket. Outwardly he was perfectly calm but inwardly was far from

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feeling so. Patterson's absence meant putting Gay in at center and playing Curtis on the second eleven and neither was as good a man. Nor did he believe that any real excuse kept Patterson away. An unexplained absence could have been dealt with, but Patterson had taken pains to observe the letter of the law and tell him beforehand. This was signal practice, too, when it was very important that all should be present.

Paul turned to the expectant players. "Gay, go in at center. Curtis, play center on the scrub. Fitzzy, you'll take the ball. Now then!"

For half an hour the signal work went on, but not smoothly. Paul was patient,—somehow Patterson's absence was conducive to that—and tried both joking and sarcasm with very little effect. The fellows either couldn't or wouldn't play to the best advantage.

"Wake up, Jacobs!" he finally snapped. "The rising bell rang some time ago! Great Scott, man, that ball ought to be on their twenty-yard line by now! What's got you? Infantile paralysis?"

Jacobs shrugged his shoulders. Time was

required for a signal to penetrate his rather sluggish brain. Once comprehended, he had done his best.

“Look here, fellows!” said Paul resolutely. “There are a few things I’m going to tell you and tell you right now. At this rate, we might as well get a red worsted ball and play kindergarten. We haven’t the team we had last year,—we all know that. But there are enough experienced men left so that we ought to do better than we are doing. From this exhibition just now, any girls’ boarding-school could knock us out!”

Faint grins from the gathered players.

“The trouble is that you aren’t playing together. So far, it’s everybody for himself. The way to win and the only way to win is to play as a unit, not as individuals. It oughtn’t to matter a continental to anybody who gets the ball or who kicks the goal, provided somebody gets it and somebody kicks it. It isn’t for yourself,—it’s for the school!

“They say we don’t stand any chance against either Sudbury or Faulkner. We *do* stand the chance of showing that we can fight for our school and do our best even though we are up

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against a stronger team. We shall lose if we keep on as we are going, but it will be because we choose to lose, because we lost those games here on our own gridiron before we ever met up with either academy. We'll lose because some of you can't sink your own private feelings. You've a grudge against somebody or you think you ought to have a better chance. You haven't a right to think one single thought of yourselves, only think for the school! Have you been doing that? You know you haven't! It takes brains to play football and some of you are just dragging great hulking bodies around the field. You can't win a game entirely with your legs. Shall we lie down without even trying? Speak up, somebody!"

Only a confused murmur came from the players, beginning to look abashed and sheepish.

"I'd as soon play with a herd of cows!" said Paul impatiently. "They at least know their leader and are willing to follow."

"Oh, go easy, Paul!" protested one or two. "We don't deserve that."

"I have been easy!" retorted the captain. "It isn't the word any longer. On October thirty-first we play Sudbury. On November

seventh we play Faulkner. This is the eighteenth. You can draw your own conclusions. Now, once for all, will you make an effort to get together and play? Play not for yourselves, not for your coach, not for your captain, but for St. Stephen's!"

Paul had at last succeeded in stirring the boys to shame. They cheered him, and cheered as though they meant it.

"Thanks!" he said briefly. "Now we'll buck up and practice the forward pass."

As the players scattered, Paul saw Mr. Bridges, the coach, standing behind him. "Will you take the play, sir?" he inquired, his color still high.

"No, go ahead," replied the coach. "Let's see how they work after that."

Paul gave him a second glance but read on his face neither approval nor condemnation. The teams were getting into position, good-naturedly, their imaginations tickled by Paul's metaphors.

"Lansing, you playful cow, take your horns out of me back!" "Whisk your tail, Jacobs, and keep the mosquitoes away." "Oh, but isn't Gay the giddy calf!" "Where's my red ball?"

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“Moo! moo! Show the ladies how beautifully you can bleat!” “Oh, you great hulking brute!”

Sharp upon their jokes came the signal and the teams sprang into action. To Paul's intense gratification they played with a different spirit, galvanized for once into concerted action. Again and again the lines flung themselves upon each other, this time with the real fighting blood. Even Mr. Bridges caught the infection, coached, criticised, backed up Paul's concise orders. The minutes passed unnoted.

“Time!” called Mr. Bridges at last.

The panting players stopped, disentangled themselves into individual persons and looked at Paul.

“Fellows, that was some stuff!” he said exultantly. “Good work! That had the ginger in it! I knew you could do it. Just keep it up and we'll show them what's what! Practice dismissed until Monday.”

“Paul's pleased with his cows,” said the irrepressible Lansing, seizing his sweater. “Didn't we do the giddy gambols though? Me for a swim and grub!”

He dashed off the field, singing at the top of his voice.

"I never saw a purple cow;
I never thought to see one.
But if Paul wants a violet cow,
Of course, I'll gladly be one!"

St. Stephen's possessed no proper track-house. The teams used the lockers and showers in the basement of the gymnasium, or kept their football togs in their rooms. Paul usually dressed in the gym, but to-night, knowing it was late, and that there would be more than enough boys to use those showers, he followed Lansing toward Foster. Most of the fellows would be ready for dinner and he could get his bath more quickly.

"Phil, you cheerful idiot, wait for me!" he called.

Lansing turned, still laughing. He was a tall, sinewy lad with a merry face. Dancing backward before Paul, he repeated his improvised song.

"You will be purple if you continue that long!" laughed Paul, as he finally got an arm around Lansing's neck.

"Finis! Continued in our next," replied Lansing promptly. "That was the talk, old chap. Stirred 'em up like a yeast-cake. I only wish Patterson had been there to hear."

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“At first, I did, too. Then when the fellows really did so well, I was glad he wasn't.”

“Where was he anyway?” asked Lansing.

“Search me!” replied Paul. “I'm going to call on him this evening and I want you to go with me.”

Lansing stopped short, then whistled. “A dark light begins to dawn upon me. Of course you must inquire for his health. Yes, I'll go along to carry away the remains.”

Patterson had just reached his room after dinner when there was a knock at his door. In response to his hail, it opened to disclose Paul Arnold and Phil Lansing.

“Good-evening,” said the captain. “I came to see if you were used up or why you didn't come to practice. It was important on account of the signals, and I was sorry to have any one absent.”

Paul spoke pleasantly, for there had been no open breach in their relations. Patterson did not ask his visitors to come in.

“My note explained itself,” he said rather stiffly. “I wasn't up to practice to-day. As for the signals, I know them.”

“Yes, but one needs to put them into play with

the team," said Paul. "I hope you won't cut again; it's a serious matter when the time is so short and we have so much to do."

Patterson made no reply and Lansing looked up. "You missed a lot to-day," he drawled. "Cap got up on his ear and made a speech. Then the fellows played ball. Real ball, you know."

"It is a pity to have missed that," observed Patterson dryly.

Paul flushed. "Come along, Phil," he said abruptly. "Practice is Monday at four as usual. Please be there. Good-night."

"Let me go back and slay him!" protested Lansing as the door again closed. "Of all the cheek! Old bonehead! Paul, why don't you fire him?"

"Because he is the best center we have and the school needs him. Do you think after my fine speeches this afternoon about sinking the individual, I can put him off the team just because personally we don't jibe?"

Phil suddenly became serious. "But that isn't all," he protested. "He's a knocker! He sets the fellows against you. Oh, not in words but he does it just the same. And he

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croaks the live-long time about its being no use because we'll be so badly beaten."

"Tell me some news," retorted Paul.

"And see how the fellows played when he wasn't there to-day."

Paul suddenly stopped. His hands on Phil's shoulders, he pushed him against the wall they were passing.

"Do you really think Bridges would back me up if I fired Patterson? As things stand, I mean. Honest, now?"

"I don't understand Bridges," Lansing replied after a moment, his eyes meeting those of his friend.

"No more do I," said Paul.

It chanced that the faculty had a brief meeting on the evening of that same day. After adjournment a number of the instructors lingered, discussing various matters.

"I hear you had rockets flying over the grid-iron this afternoon, Bridges," remarked Mr. Lowell. "My house was agog over the row. What was it?"

"Oh, Arnold told the team what he thought of them. I had been wondering how long his patience would hold out."

“What kind of a captain does he make?” inquired Mr. Barrows, who as house master of Foster knew Paul well. “I tried to extract some information from him concerning the team but he wasn’t inclined to commit himself. I surmised, though, he wasn’t finding his job any cinch.”

“Arnold hasn’t been able to get the team together yet. I am not sure but Patterson would have made the better captain,” replied Mr. Bridges slowly. “I was glad Arnold did get hot; it shamed some of the fellows into playing for the school as he told them and not for themselves. Whether it will work any permanent improvement is a question. Arnold doesn’t ask my advice so I hesitate to thrust it on him. There is good material on that team but we shall never beat either Sudbury or Faulkner unless Arnold succeeds in holding the fellows better.”

“You think Patterson would have made a stronger captain?” inquired Dr. Hilton from the head of the table. “Has he more influence than Arnold?”

“Why, no, in one sense he hasn’t, Doctor, and in another way, he has. He is as brainy a chap

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as Arnold, and fully as capable. Arnold's personal friends are devotion itself, but—well—Patterson is different. He can hold more of the boys as a leader, while perhaps as individuals they care less for him than they do for Arnold. Arnold isn't exactly snobbish, but he is fastidious and sometimes a bit of the aristocrat. He doesn't get hold of the crowd in Patterson's careless way."

"I suppose Patterson does his best to second Arnold?" asked Mr. Barrows. "The defeated candidate for the captaincy owes that to the captain, if he chooses to come out for the team at all."

"Patterson plays good ball," replied Mr. Bridges, coloring a little, for the question had been pointed. "You could hardly expect him to play up whole-heartedly after being defeated for an honor he cared so much about. He plays very good ball, on the whole, better than Arnold has done so far."

Mr. Barrows made no comment but his significant silence constrained the speaker to continue.

"Of course, Arnold has a good deal on his mind and his work will doubtless improve."

"I'm inclined to think that if Patterson had been chosen captain, Paul would play up to him without reservation," remarked Mr. Barrows.

"Very possibly. In my own opinion the team would work better under Patterson."

Mr. Barrows opened his lips to speak but changed his mind and remained silent. Perhaps he caught the shadow of a smile hovering on Dr. Hilton's face,—for some reason he made no challenge of this statement. But he lingered a moment behind the others and in that moment the faint smile assumed more definite form.

"I couldn't help laughing at you, Barrows," said the principal when the two were alone. "You and Bridges were so funny, each defending your pet candidate."

Mr. Barrows laughed. "I was rubbed a trifle the wrong way, Doctor. I've had Paul Arnold in my house for four years and I think I know him better than Bridges does."

"I agree with your estimate of him. But on the whole, I am not sorry Paul is having some difficulty with the team."

"Oh, to a certain extent, it's a good thing. He'll stand in with them all the better after he's

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once got them into shape. I only want Paul to get a square deal and I feel sure he isn't getting the support Patterson owes him. I have never fully trusted Patterson. He has a sort of cynical coldness, odd in so young a boy."

"You should scarcely judge him by the same standard as Arnold. He comes from a different social environment and has had radically different home influences. Think of the long line of cultured gentlemen behind Paul! It is hardly fair to expect as much of Patterson with a father whose one idea in life is to add more money to the heap already accumulated, and with a mother absorbed in social ambitions."

"True," admitted Mr. Barrows, "but Patterson has been at St. Stephen's three years. It is time he showed the influence of that if he is ever going to. Every time I talk with him I feel as though I was up against a stone wall."

"Yes, I know what you mean," replied Dr. Hilton slowly. "I never feel that I have reached the real Patterson at all. I may be mistaken, but under that mask that he puts on for all of us, I believe that he has a better nature. I hope he won't leave school without letting somebody have a glimpse of it. But it is

unfortunate that he and Paul have become such rivals. Still, there is no open hostility, is there?"

"Not at all. They merely let each other severely alone. Now in this matter of the team, if Patterson had the generosity and the manliness to play up to him, Paul would appreciate it and it would end in their being friends. To be friends with a fellow like Paul Arnold would be the making of George Patterson."

"If my belief in Patterson is justified," remarked Dr. Hilton imperturbably, "it wouldn't be bad for Paul, either!"

CHAPTER VII

WITH THE LOWER SCHOOL

THE sound of the rising bell is seldom welcome to either pupils or masters. That hoary centenarian, Pomeroy, was no exception to this rule as he reluctantly arose one cloudy damp morning. The prospect from his windows showed a dripping world in every direction. Nature looked anything but pleasant.

“The kids will be cross and homesick,” he thought pessimistically. “Half of them will be late for breakfast and I’ll have to send them to bed early.”

With such reflections he proceeded to dress. His toilet was still at an early stage when shrieks resounded through the house, followed by stampeding feet on the stairs.

“What on earth has happened?” he asked of himself, following the question by a hasty plunge into a bathrobe.

The hall was pervaded by small boys in all

stages of dress and undress. Some were on the stairs, others leaning over the banister, a group of four or five gathered in a knot in the lower corridor. Black and brown heads were bent over a yellow one that seemed the center of the disturbance.

"What's the matter?" Mr. Pomeroy inquired.

There was no answer. All were intent on the group below. "Is he killed?" asked an awe-struck voice from the third floor.

"*Boys!*" said Mr. Pomeroy impressively. "What has happened? Is any one hurt?"

A chorus replied. "He fell from the landing! He struck on the banister and then dropped another floor and hit the radiator!"

Mr. Pomeroy made two steps to the little knot in the hall. "Aside, boys. Let me come. Who is hurt?"

Anxious faces looked up and the group parted to disclose Archer, seated flat on the floor with a limp kitten in his arms.

"Patsy fell through the banister!" he explained mournfully. "He went 'way down from the third floor!"

In his first relief, Mr. Pomeroy felt a wild de-

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sire to laugh, but being a patient and kind-hearted young man, realized that this accident was no laughing matter to the serious children about him.

“Let me see, Archer,” he said, successfully controlling his risible muscles. “He isn’t killed, at least.”

“No, but he isn’t stiff any more,” said Archer sorrowfully. “I’m afraid he’ll never walk again.”

“No bones seem broken. I think he’s only stunned. Such a fall knocked the breath out of him. How did it happen?”

“He was playing with a horse-chestnut on the third-floor landing while we were dressing. The chestnut rolled through the banister and Patsy rushed right after it.”

“Well, he’ll probably have sense enough not to do it again,” said Mr. Pomeroy, straightening up. “A cat is popularly supposed to have nine lives, so Patsy has eight left to go on. Put him on a cushion and leave him to get his breath. And go and dress, all of you! You’ll be late for breakfast. Scamper now!”

The boys slowly dispersed, leaving Archer to procure a pillow for the kitten’s comfort.

“Poor Wee!” he declared sadly. “It’s dreadful to lose even one life in such a way.”

“If he dies, we can have a dandy funeral,” suggested Skinny hopefully.

Under ordinary circumstances, Archer’s slender physique would have been inadequate to displace Skinny’s double bulk, but anger lent added weight and the assault was wholly unexpected. With a thud, Skinny landed on the floor.

Mr. Pomeroy, still repressing a desire to laugh, pulled Archer off his victim.

“George, that wasn’t a kind remark,” he said reprovingly. “Archer naturally feels badly because the kitten was hurt. Archer, you needn’t be such a pepper-pot. I should suppose you would wish your friends to pay Patsy due respect.”

Archer looked up with big and angry eyes. “Skinny,” he announced crushingly, “is a germ! He has no sense of perspective!”

As he spoke, Archer started upstairs, an indignant little figure in blue pajamas. The annihilated George stared after him in stunned silence and then meekly followed. Mr. Pomeroy retired to his room to chuckle over the whole

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affair and to wonder what Archer knew of germs and whether he meant proportion or propriety.

As he anticipated, nearly half the boys were late for breakfast, and incurred the prescribed penalty of going to bed as many minutes early as they had been late. Archer, pale and disturbed, refused to eat; George seemed bewildered. Clearly the day was not beginning well for the inhabitants of the Nursery.

Sympathetic Mrs. Holmes came to the rescue and Archer, somewhat consoled, went to chapel, leaving Patsy in possession of every creature comfort the matron's sitting-room could afford. When he came in at noon, the kitten seemed decidedly more alert.

"Patsy's better," he said joyfully. "He's considerably stiffer. But I wish Mother was here. I had a tan-colored rabbit once. Its name was Cinnamon Bun. Somehow its leg got hurt but Mother bandaged it and it was all well the next day."

"We'll have to give Patsy until to-morrow to feel quite like himself," replied the matron. "But I'm sure he isn't seriously injured. He's

a spoiled child, Archer. He cried because I couldn't hold him in my lap all the morning."

That afternoon the rain fell steadily, not soft drops but torrents that drove against the panes and blew in through open windows. The small boys in the Nursery reluctantly went to their usual tasks. Unlike the Upper school which met only for recitation and did all preparation outside, the Lower school sat at assigned desks in a big schoolroom and worked under supervision. To-day they straggled in to find Mr. Lowell, as usual, in charge of the room. Behind him on the blackboard was written: "Some one's desk is not in order. Whose?"

The boys looked at the board, at one another and at the instructor. Archer lifted his desk-lid and peeped in.

"I can give you a perfectly good answer to that question, sir," he said at last. His face was flushed and embarrassed. In his haste to visit Patsy, books and papers had been hustled out of sight without regard to neatness.

"Hush-h!" replied Mr. Lowell mysteriously. "It's a secret, Archer."

There was a ripple of laughter for, as he

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spoke, Mr. Lowell erased the incriminating words, and then announced, "English class, attention. Study period for others."

The younger boys settled to attention but at first the lesson did not proceed very well. Rainy weather seemed to have dampened spirits and caused minds to go wool-gathering.

"Bryan," said Mr. Lowell at length, "what does the word, awl, mean?"

"It's a tool," replied Bryan promptly; "a shoemaker's tool."

"Give me a sentence containing it," went on the instructor.

"I had a little awl. I stuck it in the wall," remarked Bryan.

Mr. Lowell looked up sharply, but Bryan's face was perfectly serious nor was any member of the class smiling.

"That's not a particularly enlightening sentence," commented the teacher, ignoring the attempt to be funny, if such it was. "An awl has a point. Your example hasn't. Think of another."

"He made holes in the leather with an awl," amended Bryan, still perfectly sober of countenance.

“Right. Define the word maroon, Archer, and give an example of its proper use.”

“It’s the name of a color. Some flowers are maroon.”

“Correct for that meaning. Used as a verb, the word has another definition. What is it?”

“It’s what pirates do with mutineers,” suggested Archer. “Put them ashore. The captain marooned him on a marine island.”

Mr. Lowell bit his lip. The class looked admiringly at Archer.

“I think I should say a sea island, or a desert island,” said the instructor gravely. “Donald, define the word shipment.”

Donald was about to comply when the door opened to admit a boy who had been sent back to the Nursery to change his wet shoes. He was one of the youngest lads in the house, a nervous, unattractive child who had somehow managed to get himself more or less actively disliked by most of the Lower school.

“Find your book quickly, Thayer,” said Mr. Lowell. “Go on, Donald.”

Thayer went to his desk, opened it and dropped the lid with a bang and a shriek. Every boy in the room turned in his direction.

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“What’s the matter?” asked Mr. Lowell.

“There’s a s-snake in my desk!” replied Thayer, almost in tears.

“Oh, is there?” said the instructor. “Well, put it out of the window.”

“I don’t want to touch it!” moaned Thayer.

Mr. Lowell glanced rapidly from one boy to another. Archer looked shocked, Tommy and Donald mildly interested, Bryan,—ah!

“Bryan, you’re not afraid of snakes, are you?”

“No, sir,” replied Bryan, blushing to his ears.

“Then kindly remove that one for Thayer. Go on, Donald.”

Bryan removed the small snake that had so alarmed Thayer and obediently dropped it from an open window. Decidedly discomposed, he returned to his seat. Thayer, still sniffing, glared suspiciously into the four corners of his desk and finally extracted his book. The lesson went on with no further reference to the affair, and was succeeded by a study period and a class in arithmetic with another instructor. But Bryan was not surprised when school was dismissed at half-past three to be told to remain.

He waited in company with several others but Mr. Lowell paid no attention to him. He looked over a composition with Geoffrey, explained a geography lesson to Arthur, corrected an English exercise with Freeman. Four o'clock struck before he summoned Bryan, left alone in the big schoolroom.

"Well, now, Bryan," he said pleasantly, "tell me why you put that snake in Thayer's desk?"

Bryan considered him seriously. Mr. Lowell, leaning forward with elbows on his desk and his hair somewhat rumpled, didn't look so very formidable. Was it worth while to try to make him understand?

"I put it in," he admitted, "because we decided the other night that something had to be done to make Thayer a man."

"Oh, you did!" said Mr. Lowell. "Who are 'we'?"

Bryan stuck at answering this. "Two or three of us fellows," he explained. "Thayer is such a baby! You don't live in the house with him, Mr. Lowell, so you don't know how much he needs to be braced up. The other night we decided that something had to be done."

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Mr. Lowell looked at him searchingly. Bryan was serious and apparently in earnest.

"That evening," he went on, "we were in Mr. Pomeroy's study and Patsy was there, too. He's Archer's kitten, you know. Patsy got up on Mr. Pomeroy's desk and hid in an empty pigeon-hole. Thayer went by the desk and Patsy bounced out at him. Thayer screamed fit to raise the roof and just at a little soft kitten! But what made us decide to do something right away was the earthquake in Japan."

Bryan stopped as if this statement explained itself.

"Yes?" said Mr. Lowell. "Just what upheaval did it cause in Clarke House?"

"Why," continued Bryan, "Thayer was perfectly certain that we were going to have one here in Massachusetts and he cried. So we made up our minds that we must see about him before he got any worse. Nobody will ever like him if he grows up the way he is now."

"Well, Bryan," said Mr. Lowell, "I don't believe putting a snake in his desk is going to help him. Honestly, now, do you?"

"Of course, he didn't like it," admitted Bryan, "but it was good for him. A fellow has

to get used to things at school. Why, Thayer can't even play ball because he cries if the ball hits him, and so nobody wants to play with him. Now, Tommy fell over backward the other day and cut his head open on a radiator so the bone showed. Dr. Cary had to sew it up but Tommy never cried. Something has got to be done about Thayer."

"Thayer isn't very strong and he isn't used to playing with other boys," said Mr. Lowell. "He hasn't been well and his mother didn't like him to do things. Now, you know how it is about learning anything, skating or tennis or football,—you can't learn it all at once. The trouble with Thayer is that he doesn't know how to get on with other boys and he has to learn how gradually. It isn't easy. Suppose you were suddenly plumped down into a community of monkeys, wouldn't you find it a little difficult to get used to them?"

Bryan laughed outright.

"Making mild fun of Thayer probably doesn't do him any harm, but you must remember not to be unkind. If Thayer were as strong as the rest of you he wouldn't be so upset by trifles. You can help him most by being patient with

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him. Now, are you going to put any more snakes in anybody's desk?"

"Nobody but Thayer dislikes them," replied Bryan mischievously.

Mr. Lowell smiled. "Lucky, isn't it? Run along. But tell your committee of reform to step softly."

Bryan departed to report the message to Tommy and Donald whom he found with Archer in the matron's sitting-room. Patsy showed marked improvement, even a tendency to play.

"I said a snake was too much," said Tommy when he had heard the story. "Pepper would have been better."

"I don't think pepper would do any good," said Archer, stroking Patsy lovingly. "If Thayer liked us ever so much, perhaps he would be different."

"He does like you," said Bryan. "I don't want him to like me."

"Don't worry," teased Tommy. "No danger after this. But I guess we'd better call our job off."

Another morning found the cherished kitten quite himself, playful as ever and none the

worse for his escapade. Shortly after the boys left for school, Susan appeared at the matron's door with Patsy tucked under one arm.

"And sure, the little beast wants to kill himself," she explained to Mrs. Holmes. "I was lighting me fire downstairs under the big bricked-in boiler when I heard a rustling. Thinks I, 'tis a mouse, so I blows out the match and pokes among the papers and kindling till out pops the wee cat. 'Tis another of his nine lives that he's flung to the winds. And next, I wint to turn on the hot water and there sits the small imp in the bottom of me tub. 'Tis bent on death he is, so I've brought him up, for sure he'll be trying to put his tail through me wringer."

Mrs. Holmes shut the kitten into her sitting-room and continued her rounds through the deserted house. On reaching the third floor, she paused to smile at the unusual aspect presented by the landing. The banister was guarded by a barricade of books, ranging from Bryan's "Beginners' Latin" to Tommy's "Robinson Crusoe." Patsy should find no further excuse for trying to walk on air!

CHAPTER VIII

SUNDAY AFTERNOON

PAUL sat in his study, elbows on his desk, his head propped in both hands. Not until nearly eleven had he been alone or had a chance to think about the events of the afternoon. Now, the last visitor had departed and Alex had gone to bed.

Well, it was over, that game with Sudbury, and St. Stephen's team had been defeated on their own ground with a score of 17 to 7. It was bad, very bad. How could it have been better?

Sudbury outweighed them by a few pounds, but that could not make the difference. St. Stephen's had scored during the first quarter, held them in the second, lost ground steadily throughout the last half. That argued lack of endurance. But Phil Lansing had played like a whirlwind; to him they owed their single score. Penrose, Fraser, and Denham had gone in for every ounce they were worth.

Paul mentally reviewed each of the eleven. Jacobs, the slow-witted, had done good work at tackle, Hotchkiss had gotten around Sudbury's end again and again. There was Patterson,—at last he reached Patterson, who, curiously, had loomed in the background of his mind all the time. What kind of ball had Patterson played?

Well, he had bucked their center successfully, he had kept Sudbury from breaking through. Paul, playing left half-back, had known this. But he knew, or thought he knew, something else.

During that scrimmage in the third quarter, some one had grasped Paul's ankle, clutched it with a vim that not only made him miss a tackle, but flung him headlong. For either side it was foul play. Whoever dared do it, took advantage of the confusion of the mingled players to execute a dirty trick that would have sent him to the side-lines had the umpire seen. Perhaps it was one of the Sudbury team,—Paul wanted to think that it was. But there was that odd look on Patterson's face to be accounted for, a cool, satisfied expression strange indeed in that heated moment, caught just as Paul picked himself up. If Patterson had tripped him, it was

the worst of foul play and rank disloyalty as well. In his own mind, Paul was certain, but no one else had noticed, neither umpire, referee, nor linesman. Lansing, the only fellow he felt like asking, was in the back-field; he could not possibly have seen whether it was a red-clad or a brown-clad arm that so deftly did its work.

Having faced this one point squarely, Paul considered the outcome of the game. It showed St. Stephen's as lamentably weak, lacking in staying power, but it did show an appreciable gain in team-work. Given time, brains and practice might develop an eleven that would amount to something, but what could be done in a week? And one week from to-day came the game with Faulkner.

In past years, St. Stephen's played more games with other schools, but since Dr. Hilton had been principal, the number of outside contests had been cut to two. In this way, Dr. Hilton felt that the desirable features of the game were largely retained and the evils greatly lessened. For the past few years, this had worked extremely well; interest had not flagged and St. Stephen's had developed a team that for five seasons won from both Sudbury and Faulkner.

This series of victories seemed to justify the principal's belief that better results would be obtained if play and practice were confined chiefly to the school's own members.

But after this defeat, there was no probability that they could win from Faulkner, for Faulkner had beaten Sudbury. No, St. Stephen's team was facing certain loss. All that could be hoped was to keep the score as low as possible.

Paul's only consolation was a brief word from Mr. Bridges, the more welcome because wholly unexpected, coming in place of the condemnation he was prepared to face. To be told that he had done the best any one could do, shown both skill and resourcefulness in directing his play, was a tribute Paul had not thought to receive from the coach. The open loyalty of most of the team, their genuine, affectionate regret, helped make the defeat more bearable. If he could only settle somehow that suspicion about Patterson!

He rose to look into the corridor. All was quiet, lights out, except two with red bulbs indicating the stairs and a green one over a bathroom door. Paul stole silently down the hall to

Lansing's room. The unlocked door revealed a dark study. From Hotchkiss' bedroom came a snore, but Lansing's was quiet. Paul entered softly.

"Asleep, Phil?"

For a second there was no answer, then a voice drawled, "Yes!"

"Listen," said Paul, laughing in spite of the gravity of his errand. "Tell me, did you notice any foul play to-day?"

"Did I?" scoffed Lansing. "A whopping great brute from Sudbury handed me a dig in me vitals when nobody was looking. Their fast end twisted my neck when we were rolling round the field wrapped in each other's arms."

"Did you see any fouls on our side?" Paul asked after a moment.

"Why, no, of course not," said Lansing, becoming serious. "Sudbury was twice penalized for holding, you know. Our only penalty was when Harry got off-side. What do you mean?"

"Nothing, probably. Go to sleep. Sweet dreams and happy night-mares."

"Go to sleep yourself, old cow! Just shut that window in the study, will you? Books and furniture have been blowing about for some

time. Decided if the radiator broke loose, I'd get up, but for nothing short of that."

"Phil," went on Paul as he reached the door. "Bridges was decent to me after the game."

"Bridges also bespoke me softly," came Lansing's voice in the darkness. "Said I was on to me job. Has Bridges experienced a change of heart?"

"I'd give something to know," replied Paul, departing to close the window and seek his own room.

Dinner over on Sunday, Alex dragged Paul off for the afternoon. He knew his chum was physically tired, knew he was sick of hearing yesterday's game discussed, and knew that the coming week would be hard.

Paul at first decided in favor of the canoe, then changed his mind on realizing how popular the river would be on so beautiful a day. Walking would put him in better shape for practice to-morrow, so the two set off at a quick pace. Until vespers at five, the world lay before them.

For the past week there had been glorious weather, with warm, sunshiny noons and nights hardly chilly enough to color the foliage. Out-of-door life was a privilege to be appreciated

when every day might bring an end to complete freedom. On this Sunday afternoon the air was perfectly quiet and warm enough for midsummer. Out in the October stillness where a brown and golden landscape stretched away to mountains gleaming blue beyond the New Hampshire border, life assumed a truer perspective. The hills would remain, the sunset would light them with the same glory whether or not St. Stephen's won the game next Saturday.

No bounds were set for the older boys in the surrounding neighborhood. Except that they might not visit without special permission the town lying toward the east, miles of rolling country were free to wandering feet. The Lower school was kept strictly to certain limits, and defiance of this rule was a serious breach of discipline.

Paul had succeeded in putting his perplexities out of his head during a brisk two hours' walk, but as they neared the school grounds again and sauntered more slowly through a chestnut wood carpeted with yellow leaves, a sober expression came over his face.

“Can't you keep your mind off that game?”

Alex inquired, noticing the change. "You look as though some dire disease was preying upon you."

"I haven't said one word about it," retorted Paul curtly, having pricked his fingers on a chestnut bur that proved a delusion and a snare inside.

"True, but you are thinking about it."

"I reckon *you* would. I know, as well as if he told me so, that Bridges really thinks the eleven would have amounted to more under Patterson as captain. The thing Bridges doesn't seem to be wise about is that Patterson is the fellow who has prevented the whole team from playing up to me. I really think, if I were in Patterson's place, I wouldn't sacrifice the entire school, so to speak, just to gratify my own grudge. Bridges does back me, of course, and he was more than decent yesterday, but I feel all the time that he thinks Patterson would have made a better captain."

The boys had come to the edge of the grove. Before them lay a sunny slope stretching away to the shallow, winding river.

"I suppose," Paul went on rather bitterly, "if I were a fellow in a story, I'd say to Patter-

son: 'Here, we've lost one game and as things are, we shall lose another. Now, you be captain and we'll all get together and come out with rags of glory flying in every direction.' That's the conventional thing. But I'm going to fight it out till the bitter end.'" Paul's mouth shut in a straight line as he finished.

"I don't see why you can't drop Patterson and play your second-eleven center,—Gay, isn't it?—against Faulkner."

"Patterson is by far the better player and I can't do it without a definite reason." Paul paused for a moment. Not even to Alex was he yet ready to mention that incident of yesterday's game. "Every now and then he croaks about its being no use to play with such a bum team. He's the limit as a knocker! The other day I told him point-blank to shut his mouth. Of course, it takes the starch out of the rest. I pull 'em up and Patterson pulls them down, and so enthusiasm is one dead level. And the school is the same."

"The school has a good deal more interest in the team than you think," said Alex consolingly. "And there'll be a mass meeting Friday. Doc will jockey things up. And when it comes to

the actual playing, I think Patterson will forget himself."

"You've more faith in him than I have," said Paul gruffly. "There's one man on the faculty who has eyes. Last evening, when I looked into Barrows' study to say good-night, he was alone. He spoke of some points of the game, didn't mention anybody by name, but somehow he made me understand that he knew how it was."

"Barry's a good sort," Alex assented. "I'm mighty glad we've been in his house so long. What's that kid doing here?"

A breathless little figure came running lightly down the leaf-strewn path. Not until he was actually upon them did he see the older boys.

"Look here!" said Paul sternly. "What are you doing out of bounds?"

The child stopped in evident distress.

"Why, it's Bryan Bellew," remarked Alex. "Little Boy Blue, don't you know you haven't any business here? Go blow your horn somewhere else."

"Yes, I know it," said Bryan rather defiantly.

"Well, turn round and go home," Paul advised him lazily. "Things will happen if you

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don't watch out. We're supposed to report kids who break bounds."

Bryan stood staring with big troubled eyes.

"Haystacks are scarce round here," Alex went on teasingly. "Only chestnut-burs, sonny, and no chestnuts at that."

"I have to go down to the river," said Bryan, still standing his ground.

"Oh, you do?" inquired Paul, as he spoke, catching him with a quick hand. "Not if I know it! Go back, if you don't want me to take you. I could, easily, with three fingers."

"Why must you go down to the river and what are you doing with an extra pair of trousers?" persisted Alex, indicating the roll tucked under the captive's arm.

Bryan looked from one inquisitor to the other, his face showing a mixture of bravado and perplexity. "Oh, Arnold, please let me go," he begged, twisting helplessly in the lazy grasp of his captor. "I know I'm out of bounds but I can't help it. And I *must* go down to the river!"

"Tell us why," commanded Paul.

"Oh, but I can't!" sputtered Boy Blue. "Will you let me go if I do?"

“Try it and see.”

“You might let me. It’s very important,” begged Bryan. His awe and admiration of Paul prevented his being too importunate, but distress was overcoming his natural pugnacity.

“Tell me,” repeated Paul inexorably.

“Well!” said Bryan desperately, “some of us were down there a while ago. Oh, yes, I *know* it’s out of bounds. And we went in swimming. And a dog came and tore up a fellow’s trousers, so he can’t get home. I went after another pair.”

“Who’s the fellow?” Paul inquired.

“I won’t tell you!” declared Bryan defiantly.

“Archer, isn’t it? I thought so. Give me those trousers and tell me where he is. I’ll take them to him myself.”

In dejected misery, Boy Blue handed over his burden and indicated Archer’s lurking-place. He looked so unhappy that Alex was moved to sympathy.

“Go home, Boy Blue,” he said kindly.

“None of you kids have any business here, but I think you’re a brick to come back just to help Archer out of a scrape.”

“We won’t report you this time,” added

Paul, "but don't let us catch you out of bounds again."

Bryan turned sorrowfully schoolward and Paul started for the river. Alex, smiling inwardly, kept pace with him.

"Great Scott, Paul, don't have such a cast-iron expression!" he remonstrated. "Your jaw is set like a gladiator's. I remember when we bunked bounds and came here ourselves."

"Of course," said Paul briefly. "But Archer is the limit! And the idea of his going swimming on the first of November!"

Alex chuckled. He found extremely diverting the manner in which Paul took his fraternal responsibilities. At Paul's hail, Archer's yellow head appeared beyond a bush.

"Come out here and put those on," commanded Paul, throwing the trousers at him. "You disgraceful kid!"

Archer obeyed, casting side-long glances at his brother, glances that convulsed Alex but left Paul unmoved in disgusted silence.

"Now, look here," he said at length. "You've been swimming, which is a fool thing to do at this time of year. You'll probably have the croup to-night and a sore throat to-

morrow. You're out of bounds. If I report you, you'll catch it from Pomeroy."

Archer gave him another killing glance. "I got very tired singing in church this morning," he remarked gently. "That anthem was difficult. Mr. Carter said I did it very well and that I had better rest this afternoon. It rests me to come here."

Alex snorted but Paul's suppressed wrath exploded.

"Archer, if you hand me out any more cheek, I'll cuff you! You're disgustingly fresh. If I report you, you'll find that breaking bounds is no small matter."

"But you won't report me," said Archer confidently.

"No, not this time," Paul replied after a pause. "But if I catch you out of bounds again, I'll give you a licking you won't forget in a hurry. Now, remember that. I mean exactly what I say and I'll do it. Now, go home. No, you needn't wait for us. We don't want you."

This time Archer included Alex in a survey from under dropped lashes. Not once had his face lost its serene expression. He went, quite deliberately and with apparent unconcern.

“Paul, you’ll be the death of me,” laughed Alex as the trim little figure vanished into the chestnut grove.

“I don’t see anything funny,” was the grim reply.

“I know you don’t,” chuckled Alex. “That’s the funniest part of all!”

CHAPTER IX

THE FAULKNER GAME

DURING the succeeding week Paul wondered more than once over the changed attitude of the coach. True, the only thing he had ever had against Mr. Bridges was an instinctive feeling that he was not wholly in sympathy, but all through the daily practice following the game with Sudbury, Paul was conscious of complete and entire backing. Mr. Bridges was indefatigable in advising, in drilling weak plays, in suggesting strong ones. Once, he abruptly stopped the game to rebuke Patterson for unwarranted roughness, but the reproof lost somewhat of its significance when it was followed by one of equal severity to Hotchkiss for losing his head and getting off-side.

So far as Mr. Bridges was concerned, something had certainly rendered him less critical of Paul. Patterson was more amenable than usual, so that the captain, though aware he could

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not hope to win, felt more cheerful concerning the possible score.

The weather continued perfect, crisp golden days followed by cool nights. Saturday morning dawned in a haze of glory.

Paul had not slept well and woke unrefreshed, though like the rest of the team, he had obediently gone to bed at nine. No amount of cold water sufficed to take a queer bruised feeling from his head. On his way to his room, he met Lansing, turning out for his shower.

"Don't I feel like a boiled owl, just!" groaned Phil as he passed. "I awoke at the squawk of dawn. Catch me going to bed with the birdies again! I'll break training to-night and break it so it'll be no use to look for the pieces."

Recitations were cut short and luncheon served an hour earlier so that the school could be ready for the special train provided to take them to Faulkner. Permission to attend the game was given even to the little lads in the Nursery. Only students on probation or otherwise under discipline were prevented from witnessing the all important event.

Team, coach, and substitutes went by an earlier train, dined with Faulkner and were es-

corted to commodious quarters in the basement of the gymnasium. Faulkner possessed a finely-equipped track-house, but the accommodations placed at the disposal of their guests were quite as good as their own at St. Stephen's.

Paul had played the previous year in the great game, but then it had taken place on the home gridiron. Getting into his football suit, he felt his head clearing, felt curiously more sure of himself. The rest of the fellows were chatting quite unconcernedly while they dressed. Lansing, as usual, was playing the goat, but the general aspect of the team was calm. Presently in the distance they heard music and applause.

"We'll sing for old St. Stephen's,
Whose hill-tops touch the sky.
We'll sing the crimson banner
St. Stephen's waves on high!"

Mr. Bridges moved among the players, speaking a last word here and there. "Save yourself for the last half, Arnold," he said briefly.

"Do I stand a chance to get into it?" asked Gay, coming up with a blanket over his shoulders.

"Shouldn't wonder," Paul replied gruffly.

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“Ready now, fellows? If we don’t win, let’s give ’em a tough fight.”

The team trotted on to the field where Faulkner was already warming up. Bleachers on either side showed gay with green and red banners,—were vociferous with applause. Three thousand people had gathered to see the game. To the excited players their number seemed legion.

“Cracky, what a gang!” muttered the irrepressible Lansing.

St. Stephen’s won the toss and chose to defend the north goal. Faulkner kicked off and Denham caught the ball. The game had begun.

Paul felt himself growing more and more steady. The shouts of acclamation, the songs, the banners, the cheer leaders brandishing arms and megaphones, all became faint and far away as in a dream. He saw only the red and green sweaters of the two teams, found himself taking painfully minute notes of the game, saw at once that Wright, the Faulkner fullback, was a “wonder.”

Sharp came the umpire’s whistle. Faulkner was penalized fifteen yards for holding, but

Wright promptly gained that distance. Faulkner's right tackle tried a place kick and failed. The ball was given to St. Stephen's on the twenty-five yard line.

Paul kicked it thirty yards only to have it returned by Wright in a masterly punt. Jacobs fumbled and lost it to Faulkner.

Next, Wright made seventy yards down the field, straight through tackle, Kempton made a touch-down and Wright kicked the goal.

Faulkner's score, and Faulkner made that fact unmistakably plain. As soon as the school could make itself heard, St. Stephen's began to cheer each member of its team by name.

The next few moments were but a repetition of those just past. Faulkner ran the ball back sixty yards through all interference, tried a forward pass and failed. The ball came to St. Stephen's on the twenty-yard line. The first play lost five yards, then Paul sent a forty-yard punt caught by the Faulkner quarter-back, who was promptly tackled by Lansing. Faulkner got the ball, made a down directly through Patterson, and gained thirty-five yards around the left end. St. Stephen's line held, till Faulkner again broke through the center, Wright made a

second touch-down and kicked his second goal.

In the midst of the joyful clamor from the green bleachers, Paul turned to look squarely at Patterson. The center was covered with mud and dirt, bore every mark of a hard fray, but Faulkner had twice forced a way through the line at that point.

The first quarter ended with a score of fourteen to nothing. The teams changed goals. Paul substituted Hobbs for Parker, who had strained his shoulder. Faulkner kicked off and Paul caught the ball, but made only ten yards before being tackled. Wright got the ball, and before any one knew what was happening, got around St. Stephen's left end and added another grandstand play to his record in a third touch-down and goal.

"Fraser is about all in," said Lansing, coming up to Paul. "He can't hold that right end of theirs."

"I'll take him out at the end of the quarter," said Paul, hurrying to his place.

Presently, Faulkner was off-side and incurred a penalty of five yards. Hotchkiss succeeded in holding Wright for no gain. Next, Faulkner

kicked a field goal. For the rest of the quarter, St. Stephen's held its opponents. The half ended with Faulkner's score of twenty-four.

A disheveled, panting eleven gathered in their quarters, mopping mud and perspiration from their faces as they made the most of the breathing spell.

"Weston, you'll go in for Fraser," Paul directed. As he spoke, he felt a touch on his arm and looked around to see Mr. Bridges.

"Arnold," said the coach, drawing him aside and looking him full in the face. "If Faulkner breaks through center again, I'd advise you to put Gay in."

"Very good, sir," answered Paul, after a slight pause, during which he had exchanged a glance with Mr. Bridges. So he was not the only one who suspected Patterson of being "easy"!

The coach turned from Paul to Patterson, and from the sullen expression that crossed the boy's face, Paul guessed at a sharp expostulation. But for the team in general Mr. Bridges had only words of encouragement.

When the elevens lined up for the second half, Faulkner had put in two new men. Wright

kicked off and Paul caught the ball. For three successive plays, St. Stephen's held their opponents, but on the fourth, Wright broke through the center, made a touch-down and kicked his fourth goal.

His eyes blazing, Paul turned to Patterson. Not only had the center given way but in that heated scrimmage, Paul had again been thrown, this time, by the leg of a prostrate player. It had happened just as he attempted to tackle Wright, already through the line. Was any one but Patterson down just then?

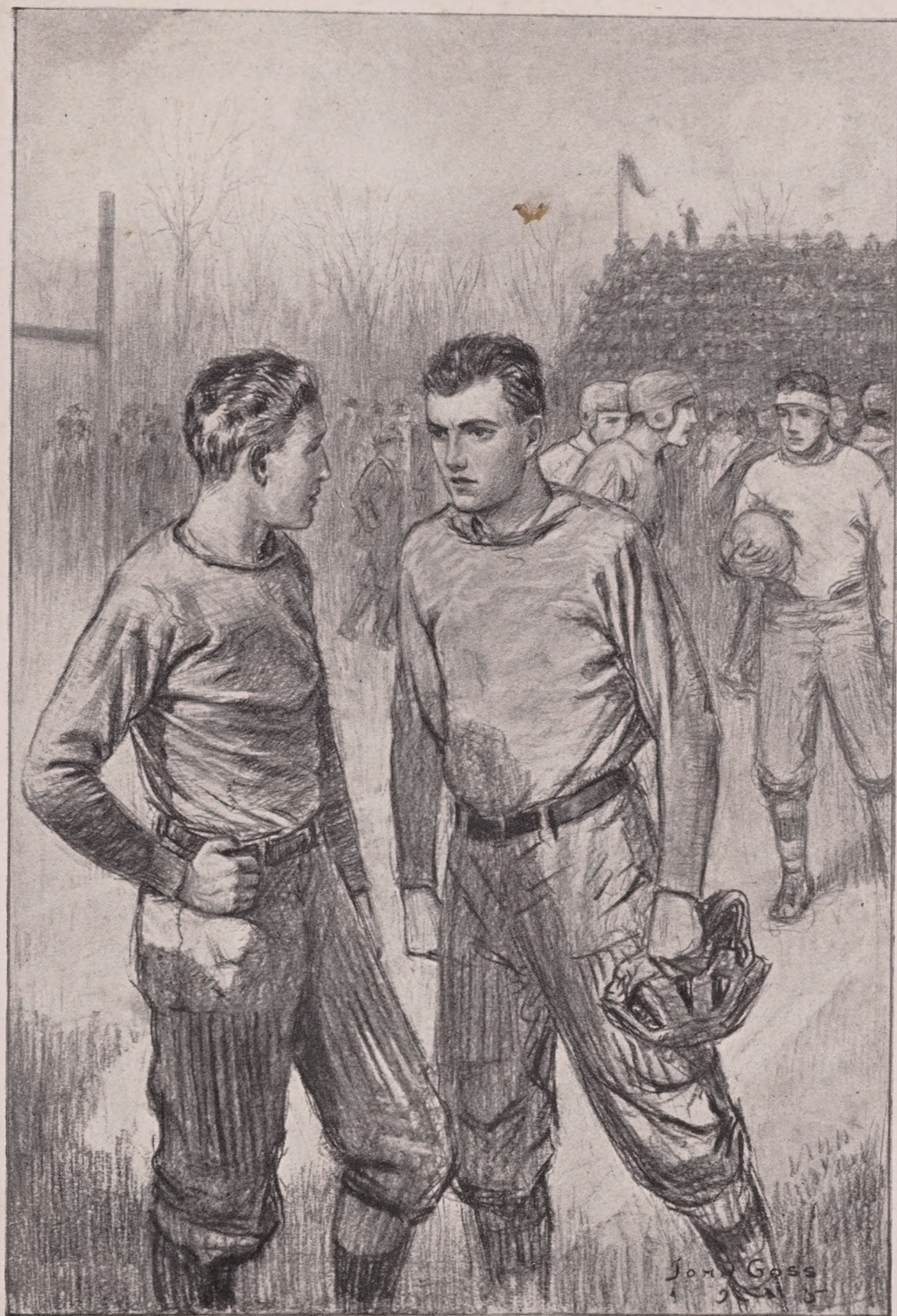
"Go to the side-line!" he ordered, beckoning to Gay as he spoke.

For a second, Patterson glared at him, an ugly expression crossing his face. "Of all the brass!" he began, then stopped.

"No words!" said Paul, his resolute eyes meeting those of the defiant center.

Patterson turned slowly, passing the triumphant Gay, running to report to the referee.

The succeeding play showed the wisdom of the change, for St. Stephen's stood like a rock. In two more plays they had gained fifteen yards. Then Lansing got the ball and made twenty yards around Faulkner's right end before being



"GO TO THE SIDE-LINE!"—Page 122.

tackled. When the group of players disentangled themselves one of the red-clad team lay prone on the ground.

"Lansing is knocked out!" went the murmur around St. Stephen's benches. Referee and players crowded up, a trainer came running with the water pail, followed promptly by Faulkner's school physician.

Presently Lansing opened his eyes, saw mistily the faces bending over him, pluckily tried to rise and fell back.

"Ankle sprained," pronounced the doctor. "Help him off the field and I'll attend to it there."

Willing hands supported the disabled player to the bleachers, where Dr. Cary joined Faulkner's physician. Tears of rage and mortification filled Lansing's eyes as he saw Thorley run in to take his place.

"Just my everlasting luck!" he muttered. "Knocked out the very minute St. Stephen's needs me most!"

But something had got into St. Stephen's eleven that had not been there before. Tired, gasping, they played with the calm of desperation. If they could not score, they at least held

the ball, held it on their twenty-yard line. It passed to Faulkner and again they held their own, came back to them and still they held it. And the half must be almost over. Come what might, Faulkner should not break through again, their star player should kick no more goals. Grimly they fought to the accompaniment of a seemingly far distant chorus of music, cheers, howls, acclamation from either side of the bleachers. And would the half ever be over?

That desperate nightmare in which the eleven seemed forlornly fighting broke before the referee's whistle. The game was ended,—thirty-one to nothing in favor of Faulkner. Paul, muddy and pale, turned frantically to an equally exhausted team. Amid the overpowering clamor that rent the air, he at last made himself heard.

“Get together, fellows, and give them a cheer! Show them how we lose!”

Loyal to command, the lads rallied, their cheer for their opponents half drowned by the babel of rejoicing from the spectators, but Faulkner heard. From across the field their team paused to cheer that of St. Stephen's and

their captain ran back to exchange a handshake with Paul.

“Honest, Arnold, I can’t be sorry we beat you, but I do wish it hadn’t been quite such a walk-over.”

“We’ll accommodate you next year,” said St. Stephen’s plucky captain, noting to his satisfaction that the opposing bleachers were now exchanging complimentary cheers.

Faulkner had rushed into the gridiron to carry on its shoulders its victorious eleven from the field. The defeated team gained their quarters almost unnoted. Paul knew that some one silently flung a blanket about him, knew that similar service had been done for the rest, knew that howls and rejoicing grew fainter behind him, heard Faulkner again cheering for St. Stephen’s, but somehow, nothing seemed real. After five years of steady victory they had lost and lost without even scoring. And he had captained that team! Small satisfaction now to suspect that the coach at last agreed in his estimate of Patterson.

Paul’s mind was in a whirl as he reached the Faulkner gymnasium but his lips were tight shut and his eyes were steady. Within, the

played-out team had literally gone to pieces. Several men were actually crying with fatigue and nervous strain. At sight of his dejected comrades, Paul choked back his own depression. After all, most of them had done their best. It was for him to try to cheer them and he mounted the nearest bench.

“Fellows!” he began. “Just a word. We’ve been badly licked. We tackled more than our match. Now, we’re up against it in more senses than one. But I want to say something to those of you who got into it for every ounce you were worth. You who played the whole game, you subs who came in on the second half, you who held them for this last quarter,—you needn’t feel that we’re wholly defeated. Any player who fights to the finish in a losing battle is worthy of respect.”

With a single exception, Paul had the attention of his audience. Patterson, after one cool, amused look, continued dressing with ostentatious disregard of the captain.

“Oh, cut it short, Arnold!” he interrupted at this point. “We none of us want a sermon.”

“My remarks were not addressed to you, Patterson,” replied Paul in a voice that fairly

snapped. "I am speaking to those fellows who showed Faulkner that we could at least lose like gentlemen."

"Right you are!" exclaimed Penrose, above murmurs of approval. "Three cheers for Cap!"

Paul stepped down amid husky and hoarse applause. Behind him Mr. Bridges stood in the doorway, an unexpected witness of the scene. His eyes met Paul's with a glance that was wholly friendly.

"Arnold has given you the good word," he said abruptly. "No whimpering now. It was an object lesson to see an eleven dig into it as Faulkner did. You were up against a dandy team. Take your medicine and be glad you put up the best fight you could. It was something to have held them that last quarter. Congratulations to the four who won their S. They all deserved it. Now, get your showers and be quick about dressing. At this rate, the barge will be around before you are ready."

The coach's crisp words dissipated whatever moral electricity was left in the atmosphere and heightened the effect of the captain's speech. Paul discarded his football rig and washed his

face while waiting a chance at the shower. In the intervals of his toilet, one player after another found a chance to say some slangily affectionate or sympathetic word. Patterson alone packed his suit-case and went out to the barge in disdainful silence.

The special train preceded the regular one bearing the defeated team, but the school chose to remain at the Riverview station until the eleven arrived. When the stiff, weary, disheartened boys descended from the car, they were greeted by a thunder of applause lasting until each individual player had been cheered by name.

This unexpected tribute was almost too much for those who had borne the burden of the strife. With lumps in their throats but gratitude in their hearts, they received their welcome home. The bitterness of defeat was somewhat lessened when St. Stephen's could still so acknowledge them.

CHAPTER X

IN THE LIBRARY

WHEN the members of the Vergil class entered Mr. Barrows' recitation room on the Monday following that unlucky ball game, their instructor surveyed them shrewdly through glasses hardly concealing an undeniable twinkle. Of the twenty students composing the division, eight belonged either to the first or second eleven. Weariness and disappointment were still written in their listless appearance. The rest, slowly settling to attention, also presented a decided Monday-morning demeanor.

"Is everybody happy?" inquired Mr. Barrows after a few seconds of complete silence.

Forty eyes instantly met his. Gradually, a responsive smile crept from face to face, leaving but two unmoved. On these, Mr. Barrows concentrated his gaze.

"Is *everybody* happy?" he repeated with equal solemnity.

The amusement that again swept the class

broadened this time into a grin, engulfing at last both Paul and Patterson.

“Right!” pronounced Mr. Barrows briefly. “That’s a great improvement. Now, we’ll begin.”

So far as Paul was concerned, the improvement was not lasting. Physically, he yet felt the effects of Saturday’s tussle, nor was his mental attitude either calm or contented.

The Upper school usually learned any lesson assigned by Mr. Barrows. He had a snappy way of conducting a recitation that interested the boys, while disguising from the unsuspecting that he really exacted a high standard of excellence. “Barry,” though strict, was popular, due to certain human qualities that made the lads forget that he was a master and regard him as one of themselves.

To-day, he tactfully avoided pitfalls into which the dispirited players might stumble, called upon the bookworms of the class, allowed them to give brilliant exhibitions, himself discoursed at length upon the manners and customs of ancient Latium, and finally dismissed the division with the same twinkle in his eye.

“Barry’s a mighty good sort,” commented

Alex as he and Paul strolled leisurely across the campus on the way to their next recitation. "He knew all you chaps were feeling rocky. To-morrow, you won't get off."

"Right you are," said Paul. "Patterson doubtless could have recited if he'd been called on. I'd like to smash his smug face in! Every time I think of him and the way Faulkner went through our center I could slay him swiftly and silently. I'll get even with him though. I'll get that Chase prize or perish in the attempt."

"How's the essay going?"

"Haven't begun to write. Been getting my material together. I've decided to take the 'Conservation of Our Natural Resources.' Uncle Court knows the Chief Forester and got him to send me some dandy stuff. If I can work it into shape, I ought to get somewhere. Funny, but the kid gave me one dinky idea. I'd thought of the subject as confined to things like forests and water-power. But Archer happened to be there when I was looking over the truck from Washington. He asked a few hundred questions and then wanted to know why it didn't mean animals, too. Of course it does. Look at the way our wild things are being killed

off! Game and fish and birds and all. That opened up a whole new line of thought for me. Think I'll put in the afternoon working at the library. See you later."

The library was an extremely pleasant place. Built on the plan of the older English schools, it consisted of a large room with high rafters and cross-beams of dark oak. Tall Gothic windows afforded plenty of light and gave a sense of space to the interior. Short stacks divided the walls into cozy alcoves with tables for students who wished more seclusion than was afforded by the larger ones down the center of the room.

Shortly after three, Paul settled himself for an afternoon of earnest work. His chosen table stood at one end of the library and commanded a view of the shallow alcoves on either side. Other workers were seated here and there, with boyish heads bent over serious tasks. In one alcove, two of the smaller lads were curled on a window-seat, absorbed in a volume of travel.

Paul worked steadily for two hours, his attention strictly confined to his own immediate neighborhood, for he had long ago learned

the advantages of a concentrated mind. Having planned his framework to his satisfaction, he leaned back in his chair for a moment's rest. His eyes fell immediately upon a familiar yellow head. In one of the nearer alcoves, Archer was leaning against the table, chatting in a most friendly way with the boy studying there.

To Paul's real consternation, the face looking into that of his small brother, yes,—even smiling, was Patterson's!

“Of all the deviltry!” thought Paul. “Thinks he'll get hold of Archer and hit me through him!”

Many a football scrimmage had taught Paul to keep his temper under extraordinary circumstances, but this was almost more than could be endured. The forceful tide of his rising anger actually startled him. He sat in furious silence, wondering what to do. Should he gather his books, leave the library and compel Archer to go with him? Or should he ignore the two until he could get his brother alone?

This seemed the wiser plan. At no sacrifice would he give Patterson the satisfaction of seeing he objected to his acquaintance with Archer. Probably Patterson, knowing Paul was there,

had detained the little chap in passing, purposely to annoy his brother.

With set teeth, Paul again bent over his scattered papers, resolutely resisting the temptation to look up. Ten minutes passed before soft steps came to his elbow.

"Alex told me you were here," remarked Archer, leaning over his arm.

Paul looked up, not at his brother, but at Patterson's vacated seat.

"It's beastly cheek of you to call him Alex," he growled, seizing upon the slightest annoyance that presented itself.

"He likes me to," Archer replied, his blue eyes widening. "Paul," he added coaxingly, "I wish you'd show me how to do an example in fractions."

"Well, I won't!" said Paul so roughly that Archer drew back in amazement. "Look here, what were you saying to Patterson? There's just one fellow in this school that you're to steer clear of, and that's Patterson. I won't have you tagging him around. *What* were you talking about?"

Archer considered him with gravely reproachful eyes.

"I'm not sure that Patterson would like me to tell you," he replied with some dignity. "But of course you won't talk about it. I wasn't tagging him either. He called me to tell me how pleased Nelly was with Patsy's picture."

"Who on earth is Nelly?" Paul asked, the angry light in his eyes fading before this surprising remark.

"She's his little sister. She's just as old as I am, but she has to stay in bed always because her back is queer. She never can walk nor ever be any better. Patterson told me about her because he says I look so much like her. He writes her a letter every single day and tells her all the things he thinks will interest her. So he wrote about my kitten. And Nelly drew a funny picture of the way she thought Patsy looked. It didn't look much like him, so Patterson brought his camera and took a picture of Patsy and Boy Blue and me. Nelly was ever so much pleased. And when I go home, I'm going to ask Mother to let me send her a Christmas present."

Paul's downcast face had turned crimson. Every word Archer spoke added to his humilia-

tion: He could scarcely remember a time when he had felt equally ashamed of himself. To meet the candid blue eyes of his small inquisitor seemed impossible.

"What's the matter, Paul?" asked Archer the next moment. "You look all hot and funny. And why don't you want me to talk to Patterson?"

"You may, Archer," Paul replied, his better self coming to the front. "I didn't understand. I'm sorry about Nelly. I never knew about her."

"They had a doctor come 'way from Europe to see her, but he couldn't make her well. And sometimes her back hurts dreadfully. My, but she's brave about it!"

"All right, Archer. I didn't mean to rag you, old fellow. Go ahead and talk with Patterson if you enjoy it. If he thinks of you and Nelly together,—he's—well, you see I don't know that side of him."

Archer lingered, vaguely disturbed by Paul's still troubled face. "You could show me now about those fractions?" he suggested politely.

Paul's responding smile was slightly uncertain, but his answer left no room for doubt.

“Bring on your wild horses!” he said, pushing his own work aside.

Archer perched unreprieved on the arm of the chair, listening intelligently to his brother's concise explanation of principles involved. At its conclusion, he nodded his head gravely, took the pencil, screwed his tongue into one pink cheek and reduced the improper fractions to their correct solution.

Paul watched the intent little face with divided feelings. To him, Archer stood for home, for Mother, for all the best and most sacred things in life, things that a fellow seldom referred to in the every-day give and take of a busy school existence. One spoke of them only to fellows one knew best and then but infrequently. It suddenly dawned on Paul that each one of those three hundred boys possessed another and unguessed side to his nature. Patterson, the cynical, the treacherous, wrote daily letters to a little invalid sister. At the thought, Paul's face burned again. And here was Archer who somehow found only the good in other people and who had certainly found an unsuspected diamond in Patterson.

Paul's eyes grew soft as they watched the

fatherless little brother. Archer was working quickly, for he was far from dull. Presently, head on one side, he contemplated his finished problem.

“Paul,” he remarked confidently, “don’t you dislike Fridays? I do, because we always have fish and spelling and I hate them both. And isn’t it a pity that it’s so impolite to use red ink?”

“Who said it was?” inquired the amused Paul.

“Mr. Chapin.” With a sigh, Archer straightened himself. “I think red ink looks very cheerful so I bought a bottle. I was late to afternoon school and Chappy made me write twenty words out of the dictionary and what they mean. I did them very neatly with my red ink, and not all short words either. But when Chappy saw them, he threw up his hands and said I needn’t cheek him like that and I could write thirty more and do them in black.”

“What happened then?” asked Paul, smiling at the earnestness of Archer’s manner.

“I told him I thought red ink was so pretty and he told me not to be fresh. Then he looked at me hard and asked if I really expected him

to accept that imposition. Then he explained that it wasn't polite to use red ink for such things, that its use was a sacred privilege belonging to the masters, but if I truly thought it was artistic and honestly didn't mean to cheek him, he'd let it go for once. But I'm quite disappointed, because Boy Blue and I like it so much and it's a whole bottle we can't use. Do you think Mother would mind if I wrote her letters with it?"

Paul gave an odd laugh. He and Archer were now wholly alone at the end of the darkening library. To Archer's surprise, he was suddenly enveloped in a hug that threatened to crack his ribs.

"Use it for Mother's letters by all means. She won't care if you write to her in sky-blue green!"

CHAPTER XI

A HALF-HOLIDAY

AFTER the defeat by Faulkner, Paul half expected a scene of some kind with Patterson. Strange that a weak spot should suddenly develop in St. Stephen's line where one had never before been suspected; strange, too, that Patterson made no protest either to Paul or to Mr. Bridges. More than once, Paul found himself wondering what Patterson had felt when the team descended at the Riverview station to be met by the loyal school. If Patterson really had been guilty of such treachery, how could he have endured being cheered by name? If he had not before realized the extent of his betrayal,—if such it was,—that reception must have brought it home to him.

The aftermath of the game was an athletic meeting that unanimously reëlected Paul as captain for his senior year, unanimously, because Patterson was absent. His non-appearance was not strange, for this was his last year

at school and he really had no further interest in the eleven. Hotchkiss, Gay, and Lansing, who attended the meeting prepared to fight to a finish for Paul, were greatly disappointed to find no fighting necessary.

This reëlection and sincere congratulations from Mr. Bridges went far toward making Paul feel that no one blamed him personally for the first defeats in a long line of victories, and that he had come through a trying season with honor, if no glory.

Alex, whose thoughtful brown eyes little escaped, was puzzled that his room-mate still seemed to feel bitter against Patterson. After one long talk, in which Paul had finally confided his unsettled suspicions, he had said nothing more, but worked over his prize essay with a kind of resentful determination that surprised Alex. Paul was usually too even-tempered and too broad-minded to lay things up against people.

"I think," said Alex one evening, "that I shall have to dub you with a new title."

"What?" asked Paul lazily. Phil Lansing and Harry Hotchkiss completed the quartette lounging in Study 18. To some remark of

Harry's about the Chase prize, Paul had openly declared that he did not care who got it provided the winner be not Patterson.

"Paul of the G. G.," said Alex slyly.

"Green goggles? Gray goloshes?" suggested Harry.

"Paul doesn't wear glasses and dotes on having wet feet."

"Glad glances! Grinning girls!" put in Phil with a shout of laughter.

"Graceful grimaces!" added Paul.

"All off," said Alex. "What were we talking about?"

"Why, the prize," said Harry. "Paul said his essay was done and that he didn't care a hang who got it if George Patterson, Esq., only got left."

"Paul of the G. G.," repeated Alex gravely.

"Great grudge? Glorious grouch?" asked Paul.

"Whichever you choose," replied his roommate.

"*Et tu, Brute!*" declaimed Paul mournfully.

"Come on, fellows!"

He caught Alex around the neck and pulled him down on the couch.

“Nice example for the House-president of Foster to start a rough-house!” grinned Phil, but he willingly helped matters along. Harry, however, opened the door into the corridor. Suspicious sounds had caught his ear.

“Paul, there’s a water-fight going on upstairs!” he exclaimed.

Paul released the half-throttled Alex. Mr. Barrows was out and in his absence the duty of keeping order devolved on the House-president.

“Come and see the fun!” said Phil, following Paul as he dashed up the steps leading to the third floor. “I love to hear St. Paul lay down the law.”

When Paul reached the scene of action he laughed in spite of himself. Two of the younger boys were indulging in a water-duel. Clad in pajamas, already soaked from head to foot, hair plastered down tightly, Scherström and Wrigley, known as “Shoestrings” and “Gum” presented an absurd appearance. Each was provided with a mug, and the pails supposed to be used only in case of fire, furnished a supply of water. Their laughing spectators were gathered at a safe distance, for

floor and corridor walls were already drenched and dripping.

"Look here, Scherström!" said Paul, controlling his amusement. "Cut it short, you and Wrigley. You've had your fun. Now get some sponges and mop the place up."

Dismay spread over the faces of the duelists. A roar went up from the spectators.

"Oh, Arnold, you won't make us do that?" implored Shoestrings, a round-faced boy with an impudent snub-nose.

"Hanged if I will!" declared Gum.

"Oh, yes, you will, both of you!" said Paul quietly.

The gathering crowd of on-lookers snickered again. Paul embodied authority and the two knew it. Should they refuse to obey him, it would mean being disciplined by the House committee and whatever penalty they decreed, Mr. Barrows would uphold.

"Oh, well!" said Shoestrings. "It's a giddy imposition, of course, but I suppose we might as well humor you, Arnold."

"Just as well," agreed Paul imperturbably. With arms folded, he leaned against the wall, while the late combatants procured large bath-

sponges and, enlivened by jeers and advice from scoffing friends, proceeded to mop both walls and floor.

"You needn't stay, Arnold," suggested Shoestrings with an impertinent grin. "You may get your feet wet."

"At any rate, they're not getting cold," replied Paul.

This retort brought renewed gibes from the crowd, and Shoestrings, seeing there was no hope for him, began to work in earnest.

"Put those pails back where you got them," directed Paul when the corridor was no longer afloat. Gum obeyed.

"Is *that* all?" inquired Shoestrings, letting fly his bath-sponge in the direction of his grinning companions. "Oh, did that hit you, Lindsay? What an unfortunate accident!"

"Yes," said Paul, "it was unfortunate. If Lindsay chooses, I'll help him duck you. Cleaning up isn't quite so much fun, is it? Better get into dry things. Good-night."

Paul departed, his quiet mastery of the situation completely calming the turbulent spirits of the third floor.

"If we'd only got into bed before Arnold

turned up, he wouldn't have known who did it," complained Gum.

"Yes, he would," said Shoestrings. "He'd have looked in every room till he found two fellows who were wet and have dragged us out. It wouldn't have done us any good if we'd really been in bed and sound asleep."

"To-morrow," said Paul, returning to his room to find only Alex, "is a great day. It is Wednesday, *ergo*, a half-holiday. At twelve, I give to Barry my finished essay. At one, we lunch. At one-thirty, we take to the river, weather permitting, and loaf the whole afternoon."

"Agreed," said Alex, "provided I may correct proof for the 'Inkstand.' "

"You may," Paul conceded. "Look here, did you really mean that? G. G., you know?"

"It wasn't wholly a joke," said Alex after a pause. "This isn't like you, Paul. In any case, I'd rather be the injured party than the injurer. But, granted that Patterson has tried to injure you, I think you are in a position to be generous. I wish you didn't care so much about defeating him in this matter of the Chase prize."

“Human nature is desperately wicked,” said Paul, sitting down on the arm of Alex’s chair and twisting an arm around his neck. “You are the only fellow in school I’d let say that to me.”

“I wish you didn’t,” repeated his friend earnestly. “You’ll say I’m a croaker, but sometimes things cost too much. A prize can be won at the expense of things much more valuable.”

“Shall I tear up my essay?” asked Paul laughingly.

“No, of course not! Hand it in. Only don’t feel as you do about Patterson. You don’t *know* that he tripped you or *know* whether he purposely let the line break. If he didn’t, you are doing him an injustice. If he did, he is beneath your contempt. And in either case, the injury to the school and the disloyalty is something more serious than his paying off a private score.”

Paul was silent. Alex seldom “preached,” seldom indeed, criticised at all.

“You’re right about the school,” he admitted at length. “But I’ll try, old chap.”

“Won’t the others go with us to-morrow?”

Alex asked, breaking the reverie in which Paul seemed plunged.

“Phil and Harry are going into town. I didn’t want any one else. Have you run across Archer to-day? I haven’t seen him lately.”

“Yes,” said Alex. “Not to speak to. He seemed happy.”

A puzzled line appeared on Alex’s forehead as he spoke. It could do no possible good to tell Paul that he had passed Archer, walking and talking in a most friendly manner with Patterson.

The anticipated afternoon proved wonderful for the time of year. December seemed to have stolen a day from June. The boys were actually too hot as they launched the canoe and were presently paddling with coats discarded and shirt sleeves rolled. Trees were leafless, meadows were brown, but the river was wholly free from ice and the warm sunshine lent the illusion of a different season.

It was possible to go ten miles upstream before coming to a carry and the boys paddled fully seven before turning to drift idly back. Paul was feeling nonsensically happy. The

essay over which he had worked so faithfully was in Mr. Barrows' hands, school would close in just one week for the Christmas holidays and no compelling duties threatened for the morrow. But after a while a silence fell upon them as they floated down the river. Occasionally Alex whistled softly or Paul hummed a tune, but for most of the time both were too contented even to speak. The unseasonable weather had brought out a few turtles and sunlight reflected from their shiny backs made them points of light in the distance. About the swampy meadows muskrats were building.

"This is all blissful," said Alex at length, "but from my pocket the 'Inkstand' proof is upbraiding me. Let's beach the canoe and sit by that stone wall up in the edge of the woods."

Paul agreed and grounded the canoe on the bank designated. In the shelter of the wall he settled himself to read while Alex worked over the printer's slips. His book proved absorbing for it was long since he had had the leisure to read for amusement alone. An hour passed. Alex completed his task, rolled up his proof and began to write a letter. Suddenly he looked up.

From the other side of the wall came the

sound of stealthy steps and crackling leaves. Paul, intent on his story, did not notice.

“Fifteen men on the dead man's chest,
Yo ho! and a bottle of rum!”

At this Paul pricked up his ears for the ferocious chorus was led by an extremely sweet little voice. The next moment, three small boys popped over the wall, wearing black masks and brandishing home-made wooden swords. They were followed by a fourth who landed almost on top of Paul.

“What's this?” Paul inquired. “Archer, what are you doing here?” he demanded, catching the small person who had stumbled over him. “You're out of bounds again!”

“Of course,” said Archer calmly, taking off his mask as he spoke. “We are playing pirates. We couldn't *be* pirates unless we *were* out of bounds.”

The finality with which he presented this perfectly plausible explanation convulsed Alex, and for a moment rather staggered Paul.

“You young reprobate!” he growled. “You can't catch me with your chaff. Now, Archer, this going out of bounds has got to stop.”

"Yes?" inquired Archer politely, casting a glance after Bryan, Donald, and Tommy, who were out of sight and presumably in safety. "We were just going back."

"You won't go until I've got through with you," threatened Paul, holding the culprit firmly before him. "Remember what I told you when I caught you by the river? Well, I'm going to do it. You'll get a licking now."

"Oh, go easy!" drawled Alex. "He's pretty little. Spank him if you must but don't lick him."

Paul relented. Archer did look so small and helpless and his big eyes were round and startled. "All right," he assented. "I reckon a spanking will do the business."

"Paul, you've no right to do it!" expostulated Archer. "You're a beast!"

"Anything you choose," agreed his brother, proceeding to administer the promised punishment. Archer took it without a whimper, but the instant he was released, withdrew a few paces and glowered angrily.

"Listen," said Paul kindly. "I did it because I said I should. Don't go out of bounds again. Now shake hands with me."

"I won't!" exploded Archer. "I hate you, Paul! I'll get even with you for this. I won't shake hands and I'll go out of bounds whenever I darn please!"

With the last word, Archer turned and fled. Had Paul wished to catch him he would have found the chase long after the start Archer had secured. But Paul was too much surprised to pursue.

"Well, did you ever!" he exclaimed and then joined sheepishly in Alex's unconcealed and delighted amusement.

"Gabriel is evolving all right enough," chuckled Alex. "Plucky little chap! On the whole, I'm rather glad he sassed you, old fellow."

"The idea of his saying that! Archer!"

"It did sound a bit incongruous from Gabriel's tongue, but all the same I like him for being so spunky. Now, own up, don't you?"

"Oh, he's spunky,—I don't mind that," assented Paul, looking across the valley. Archer had slackened his pace on the opposite slope, but even at that distance they could see that the erect carriage of his slender body and proud little head had not lessened. But

just before he disappeared into the grove below the summit, one arm went up across his eyes.

“Poor little beggar!” said Alex sympathetically. “Of course he couldn’t be a pirate and stay in bounds!”

“I didn’t mean him to get away until I made him own he deserved it and got him to shake hands,” observed Paul regretfully. “Then he wouldn’t have cared so much. Well, he’ll be all right to-morrow. Archer is so sweet-tempered that he never holds a grudge.”

“He will be sweet if he gets over it that soon,” said Alex. “I’d give him a little longer.”

Paul looked uncomfortably at the spot where the boyish figure had disappeared. He was stirred by an impulse to follow and by a judicious mixture of petting and reproof coax Archer into immediate reconciliation. But the impulse was overpowered by indolence, pure disinclination to move from his lazy enjoyment of the unseasonable sunshine. Where was the need? Archer would be “all right” to-morrow.

Archer, choking with rage and humiliation,

gained Clarke House unchallenged. He stole through the deserted halls to his room and confided his sorrows to Patsy, curled on the window-seat. He had held himself in check so long that his tears, wholly of anger, soon became those of dejection and misery. Had Paul appeared at this psychological moment, forgiving and affectionate little Archer would have "made up" in an instant. Patsy tasted a tear and patted a soft paw on his cheek but no other comfort came. Presently a keen sense of resentment routed Archer's dejection. He rose, washed his face and dressed. Yes, without doubt, he would find a way to "get even" with Paul!

CHAPTER XII

VESPERS

PAUL did not see his little brother again until choir rehearsal on Friday evening. Except at chapel they seldom met unless by design, for the Lower school was purposely kept by itself as much as possible. When Archer chose to avoid Paul and Paul made no effort to look Archer up, they might as well have lived on different planets as far as any intercourse was concerned.

The rest of his half-holiday had not proved thoroughly enjoyable to Paul. He felt that Alex disapproved of his fraternal discipline and though he still thought it excusable, wanted some assurance that sweet-tempered Archer bore him no grudge.

Mr. Carter called the choir to attention just as Paul entered. The rehearsal was for the last vesper service before the Christmas holidays and the music was chiefly quaint old anthems and carols. Archer, as usual, had a

solo, and the organist not only kept him at his elbow during the hour but detained him after the others had gone. Paul waited outside for a few moments but the night was cold and he finally gave it up. During the entire rehearsal he thought that Archer avoided looking at him. He hated to have the Imp cherish any ill-will against him. But just the same, he wasn't going to make any further advance himself,—kicking his heels in the snow for fifteen minutes was quite enough.

At vespers on Sunday, Archer sang his solo, sang it with the pure, perfectly passionless voice of a child. Even to those who had grown accustomed to the beauty of his music, it seemed that "little Gabriel" had never sung so well.

After service, Mr. Carter remained as usual to play the organ for half an hour. To-night, there would be Christmas selections and as soon as he could do so, Paul slipped in at the back of the chapel. Not many of the boys had gone, and all lights were out except one by the keyboard of the organ. The dimly illuminated church showed mysterious shadows in its raftered roof. Faint odors of evergreen and pine came from festooned arches.

Friends were doubtless present in numbers but it was hard to distinguish faces in the soft gloom, and every boyish figure was already silent in attention. Paul slid into a vacant pew at the rear, conscious immediately of the spell of beauty and peace cast by the music.

The swinging door into the vestibule opened and shut noiselessly. Looking up, Paul saw a little figure at the end of his seat. No need to recognize it by yellow head or rough Mackinaw coat, its alert poise betrayed its identity. Forgetting the pose of indifference decided upon as due to his own dignity, Paul held out a welcoming hand.

That he might receive a rebuff had apparently never entered Archer's head. He dropped his jacket on the seat, inserted himself within the circle of the extended arm as though he had last parted with Paul on the best of terms and settled close to listen.

"Here come the camels humping along," he whispered softly. "And, oh, don't you love the Christmas star!"

The camels "humped" their way to Bethlehem and departed; the star sang its song to the glorious end, but the music was only a dis-

tant background for Paul's meditations. In the warm silence of the dim chapel, with his chin resting on Archer's hair, he was thinking more humbly than brilliant, ambitious Paul Arnold often thought.

What did that lost football game matter after all? Was it not the personal element that loomed so large in his mortification over defeat? The school would go on, there would be other games, ten years from now no one would remember who had been captain in that last inglorious battle. But every year Christmas would come with its message of peace and good will; every year the wise men would journey to Bethlehem and the star repeat its song.

And here was Archer, who had been singing so divinely not twenty minutes ago, Archer, who didn't bear him any grudge for the other day, who was always so sure that people were friendly and in consequence found a friend in every one.

Being so much older, Paul's interests had never clashed with those of the little brother, of whom, to use his own phrase, he was "ridiculously" fond. Nor was he blind to the unquestioning adoration Archer bore him. But

now, with the Christmas music softly filling the dusky chapel, Paul admitted to himself that Archer was more than a playmate, an amusing comrade for an idle hour. There was something fine in Archer, fine in the truest sense of the word, some subtle personal quality that Archer's older brother didn't seem to possess. Not a boy in Upper or Lower school passed Archer without a smile or a pleasant word. And this after one term! There were a number of fellows who had no use for the captain of the eleven.

Paul remembered his prophecy concerning the little brother's development in toughness. Had it not worked the other way? Archer was still gentle, still kept unchanged his quaint politeness. He talked a great deal, did the Imp, but even after all these weeks at school, employed singularly little slang. His precise use of language was due largely to his musical training, to a nice sense of words gained from wide acquaintance with sacred music, but the effect produced on others seemed remarkable. Whenever Archer was present, the older fellows were more careful what they said and how they said it. Having affectionately dubbed

him Gabriel, they apparently wished him to remain in character.

Of course, he had one great gift—his remarkable voice—and through that he influenced many who listened with no thought of envy or emulation. But it wasn't all the music nor his engaging ways, it was something inherent in Archer himself.

"I suppose," Paul thought in genuine humility, "that the school rates me as one of the most popular fellows. I know most of the chaps like me. Some of them envy my standing. It is true that so far, I've won every honor I set out to get, except those games. But when Archer's my age, the school will like him in a way they've never liked me. He won't go in for athletics and he won't work for honors, and he won't care a rap whether he ever gets any. He only wants people to love him and they'll keep on doing that without his even trying to make 'em. There's that old sourball, Patterson. Even he understands that Archer is different. And if those two can have common ground it means that Patterson has got something in him worth liking. I won-

der if he did trip me, if he deliberately let Faulkner through! I wish—”

The music, growing gradually louder and more insistent, here forced itself upon Paul's attention. Under his breath, Archer was singing with the organ: “King of Kings and Lord of Lords! King of Kings and Lord of Lords!”

The chorus ended in a final ecstasy of jubilant chords, succeeded by silence. Lights flashed up over the chapel, boyish forms roused themselves from relaxed attitudes, or disentangled intertwined arms from Laocöon-like groups.

“There certainly was some class to that music,” said Archer reflectively. “I think I'll go and tell Mr. Carter how much I liked it.”

Paul smiled. Whether or not his small brother repeated his appreciation in the exact words just spoken, Mr. Carter would receive the tribute as man to man, from one musician to another.

Archer gathered coat and cap and then turned. “Paul,” he said coaxingly, “you didn't have to do it over yet, did you? I don't care now; I truly don't.”

“What are you talking about?” Paul asked, quite at sea, but Archer had caught sight of the organist about to leave his instrument. Forgetting everything except his desire to speak to Mr. Carter, he hastened down the aisle.

CHAPTER XIII

THE CHINA CAT

PAUL was whistling happily as he collected his clean collars. In the center of the study stood a half-filled steamer-trunk; Alex in his bedroom was packing a suit-case, and all these preparations indicated that school would close next day for the Christmas vacation of three weeks.

"I told Archer to bring his things over here," said Paul, breaking off in his tune. "Thought there was no need of our taking more than one trunk. I wish he'd get a move on."

"He's coming," replied Alex, glancing from the window. "Archer and Boy Blue, both loaded down."

"If he's brought a lot of stuff he can jolly well sort it out. Does he think I'm traveling with a Saratoga?"

"Indeed, I haven't a thing here I won't need," protested Archer in reply to Paul's remonstrance at sight of their laden arms.

"I reckon I'll be the judge of that," decreed

his brother. "Well, you are no centipede,—you don't need so many shoes. Think you'll wear this white suit? What in creation is *that?*"

Paul stopped, truly aghast before a huge china cat carefully deposited upon the floor by Bryan. More than life-size, colored to resemble no known species, it glared diabolically from round green glass eyes.

"It's my Christmas present for Mother," Archer explained proudly. He and Boy Blue both cast admiring glances at this triumph of ceramic art.

After one moment of speechless incredulity, Paul sat down in the nearest chair.

"Archer Arnold, do you mean to say you—you *bought* that atrocity?" he finally gasped.

"Why not?" asked Archer, turning surprised eyes upon him.

Alex, overhearing a sort of groan from Paul, looked from his room, saw the cat and the serious children, gave one glance at Paul's face and sank limply upon the couch.

"Mother will like it," went on Archer. "Bryan and I thought it would look so nice by the open fire in the library."



"WHAT IN CREATION IS *THAT*?—Page 164.

A vision of the library that had been his father's pride rose before Paul's mind. He could see the book-lined shelves, the fine pictures, the beautiful old mahogany furniture glowing in the firelight. One big leather chair always held two very comfortably, and what entrancing stories had there been told to a little boy! Archer had been only three when Father died; he did not know about the stories. And in contrast to the library and all it stood for,—that appalling china cat!

“Mother will *not* like it!” said Paul, his determination deepened by his room-mate's apparent agony. “At least,” he added, relenting at sight of the disappointment dawning on Archer's angelic face, “if she does, it will be only because you got it for her. Since you and Boy Blue both think it so beautiful, why don't you give it to Clarke House? It can sit by the fire and you can see it every day.”

“We have Patsy,” explained Bryan. “We don't need it.”

“I bought it for Mother,” Archer repeated, his eyes slowly filling.

“Oh, Jerusalem!” exclaimed Paul. “All

right, Archer. But I don't see how you can take it. It won't go in any suit-case and it's too high for the trunk."

"I can carry it in my arms," suggested his brother hopefully.

"You will not!" replied Paul. "I won't travel with it. Nothing will induce me to have it along."

Archer was silent. To him the cat was a marvelous work of art. Ever since he and Bryan discovered its charms lurking upon the top shelf of the village store he had coveted it as a gift for his mother. His allowance for a whole month had gone toward its purchase. It represented genuine self-denial in the form of candy and ice-cream.

"I bought it for Mother," he said again after a pause. "Won't you let me take it, Paul?"

Something in his wistful face or the gentle dignity of his tone, softened Paul's outraged feelings. He could not put himself in Archer's place and admire the fearful beast, but his own affection told him that Mrs. Arnold would tolerate the funny gift.

"We can't take it on the sleeper, Archer," he said decidedly but more kindly. "Find one

of the janitors,—Dennis, if you can,—and ask him to pack it for you. He'd better put it in a barrel of excelsior. Tell him to ship it by express and send the bill to me."

"Oh, that's good!" exclaimed Archer joyfully. "It can't get broken then. I was so afraid I might drop it."

"It *will* get broken if it stays in the same room with me," muttered Paul. "Yes, I'm sure it will get there on time. I'll bank on its arriving if nothing else ever does! But, Archer, don't you buy any more Christmas presents for Mother without consulting me."

Clasping the cat in both arms, Archer departed, followed by Bryan. Paul turned a flushed face upon his room-mate.

"Isn't that kid the limit?" he growled despairingly. "Can't you imagine my mother when he springs that terrible monstrosity upon her? And it will sit by the fire, exactly where he wants it, and grin the whole vacation!"

"It is fierce!" agreed the laughing Alex, leaning back among the pillows. "I couldn't just see you traveling with that animal, but you were up against it with Gabriel looking like a grieved cherub. You squeezed out of the diffi-

culty very cleverly. Sometimes, I rather like you, Paul!"

The Christmas holidays had not been anticipated by the boys alone. Mrs. Arnold, counting every day, counted every hour as the one approached that would bring her sons. To have Paul away was a test of courage that usage had made endurable, but she could not as yet adjust herself to Archer's absence. Only a firm belief that it was for his good had induced her to part with him. Nothing but the conviction of pronounced improvement would persuade her to allow him to return.

She was on the platform to meet the train, a slender, beautifully-dressed woman, looking less than her forty years. Time had not silvered her hair, her face was fresh and young, and its expression betrayed the source of Archer's lovely smile. She had early discarded her widow's garb, saying bravely that her boys should not be saddened by black garments.

Paul looked down the platform as he left the car but his glance missed his mother. Archer, from the top step of the sleeper, saw her face and breast-knot of violets, gave one delighted

squeal, abandoned his suit-case to the mercy of any chance passer and sprinted for her.

“Wish that had been the china cat,” thought Paul as he hailed a porter and followed, less impetuously but no less eagerly. When he reached his mother, Archer was still clutching her as though fearful she would vanish before his eyes.

“Here, let me have a chance!” said Paul, laughing at the picture, for Mrs. Arnold’s hat was askew, Archer had lost his completely and his yellow head was burrowed deep into furs and violets.

“Paul!” said his mother, looking up with smiling eyes dimmed by affectionate tears. “Archer darling, let me kiss Paul.”

“Only once, Mother!” said Archer firmly.

“Well, haven’t you the cheek!” laughed Paul, meeting Mrs. Arnold’s amused glance. “She was my mother long before you had any claim on her.”

Archer talked a steady stream until they reached the house where the old colored cook and butler greeted them as only southern servants can greet the home-coming children of the

family. After dinner, a meal into which as many favorite dishes of both had been crowded as could be forced within its limits, Paul left Archer to have his full share of cuddling and himself ran over to see his uncle.

No one was at home. Paul paid a visit to the stable. One of the horses there was his own, a gift from Uncle Court on his fourteenth birthday. Firefly had not forgotten his master and greeted him with a joyful whinny. Paul lingered a few moments to pet the beautiful Kentucky thoroughbred and promise him a fine gallop on the morrow. After some chat with his uncle's groom, he returned to his own home.

Mrs. Arnold was sitting in the big chair before the library fire with Archer on her lap and lounging opposite, twisting a delightfully fragrant cigar in his fingers, was his uncle. Seated between them was Antoinette, Uncle Court's only child.

"Hello, Tony!" exclaimed Paul, hailing her joyfully. "Uncle Court, I'm jolly glad to see you again. I must have gone one way round the square while you were coming the other."

"Well, how goes it, Paul?" asked his uncle affectionately. He had always been fond of his

nephews, but after his brother's death, when he found a little lad of ten completely overwhelmed with grief and the terrible responsibility of a promise just made to his dying father to "take care of Mother and Archer," Paul had been doubly dear to him. As for Paul, words could not express his loyalty to the uncle who had comforted his great sorrow and promised always to share that charge and to help him fulfill it. Mrs. Arnold did not wholly understand this bond. At times, she felt that her brother-in-law was unappreciative of Archer's equal claim to his affection.

Antoinette jumped up to greet her cousin. She was a tall girl with a graceful boyish figure.

"Tony, you've been growing up!" said Paul accusingly after the first glance. "Your dresses are down, and your hair—Tony, you haven't put up your hair?"

Antoinette laughed, pulled out four pins and shook a mass of wavy brown hair about her piquant little face.

"Mother thinks I should put it up now. Dad doesn't! He takes it down when we're alone. Oh, Paul, will you ride with me to-morrow?"

"Sure, will I!" assented Paul. "What time?"

Antoinette eagerly appealed to her father. "Could you go too if we wait until afternoon?"

Mr. Arnold shook his head. "I doubt if I can ride at all to-morrow, so go when you choose. Paul, I've been using your horse more or less. I thought it better not to leave him entirely to a groom."

"Before breakfast, then?" inquired Antoinette, turning to her cousin.

"Great Scott!" replied Paul. "Tony, I've piled out of bed at seven every morning except Sunday this whole term. I simply loathe the sight of the figure seven on a clock-face! My idea of a real vacation is to let my watch run down."

"We'll say two in the afternoon," proposed Antoinette gravely.

"I'll be out by eleven," retorted Paul. "Let's start right after lunch and go as far as we please."

"Mumsey?" put in Archer sleepily. "Have waffles for breakfast. You know, Paul will get up to eat waffles."

"So will Archer," teased Tony. "Archer,

you darling, I think you might come and hug me for a little while."

"To-morrow," responded Archer, giving her one of his charming smiles. "Mother wants to hug me to-night."

"What is Mother going to do when you grow too big to sit on her lap?" asked his cousin.

"Then I'll be too big for yours, too, Tony," said Archer sweetly. "But I'll not be too big so long as Mother wants me." The sentence ended in an undeniable yawn.

"Come, sonny, let's go to bed," said Mrs. Arnold. "There are three weeks of vacation ahead of us. Yes, indeed, I'm coming to tuck you in."

Archer relented and gave Antoinette a hug before he went out, his arm still clasped around his mother's waist.

"Aunt Elinor is so lovely with Archer," said Tony softly, her eyes following them. "He's a dear, but she is just sweet! Paul, has Archer got into funny scrapes? And don't they all adore him?"

"I don't think he's done anything very remarkable," replied Paul. "They keep the kids pretty busy and look after them closely. Ar-

cher hasn't had much chance to get into trouble. Yes, everybody likes him, and they immediately dubbed him Gabriel. The fellows don't know just what he is going to say or do, so they stand around and watch. Tony, you'll explode when you see what that child has for Mother's Christmas gift."

Paul told the tale, doing full justice to Archer's choice. "I can't imagine how he ever came to admire it," he ended. "As a rule, the kid has rather good taste and knows when things are ugly. But he fell down flat on this. I'm relying on you, Tony, to tumble over that cat, or sit on it or somehow demolish it before another vacation."

"I'll do my best," said Tony gravely. "We'll have to stand it now, but before you come back again, I'll try to disable it. Oh, Paul, Mother's letting me have a dance on the day after Christmas, and the Kildeanes are having one, and Aunt Elinor is planning one for you and a children's party for Archer. And we'll have such rides with Nixie and Firefly! Dad says he'll take us to the theater and we can go motoring. Oh, these will be the nicest holidays!"

Paul gave a long sigh of content. "Sounds great, Tony. Nothing like home, after all! I haven't had my fair chance at Mother yet, but it's good just to get here."

"How did you come out with that essay?" asked his uncle. "Did you get the stuff I asked them to send?"

"Oh, yes, Uncle, it was no end of help. I had a dandy lot of material. I don't know, of course, whether any one else wrote on the same subject, but thanks to you, I'm sure that nobody had better references to work from. I did plug like the dickens over that essay but it suited me when it was done. Yes, it's off my hands and off my mind, too, till we hear from the judges, some time next term."

"You feel that it stands a chance of getting the prize?"

"I'm pretty sure it does, Uncle," said Paul after a pause. "There is only one other fellow who is as likely to get it, and he won't if my best is as good as I think it is. I don't care who does have it, if only it isn't he."

The tone was a trifle bitter, and Paul's face had an expression his uncle had never seen there before. His keen eyes noted this, and saw in

addition far more than Paul had any idea he was betraying.

“How I hope you’ll get it!” said Antoinette enthusiastically. “I’m certain you will.”

Mr. Arnold made no comment and continued to puff his cigar leisurely but the rather searching look he gave his nephew was capable of more than one interpretation.

“Archer is the same old darling,” said Antoinette as she and her father strolled the two blocks to their own home. “He hasn’t lost one of his sweet ways. But Paul is different.”

“Paul, like Tony, is growing up,” replied Mr. Arnold.

“That’s not all!” retorted Tony wisely. “Something has made Paul unhappy.”

“Do you really think so?” inquired her father. “What an astute little person it is! Well, do your best to make Paul have the pleasantest possible vacation.”

CHAPTER XIV

CHRISTMAS

PAUL was awakened on Christmas morning by his excited small brother, invading his room at an early hour.

“Merry Christmas, Paul! Do get up.”

“Get up? It’s night yet,” said Paul sleepily.

“Oh, you’re mistaken!” reproved Archer.

“It’s ten minutes to seven.”

Paul groaned. “Don’t you say that word to me again this vacation!”

“Seven? But it’s a nice time on Christmas morning. Please get up, Paul. You know we can’t see our presents until after breakfast.”

“There isn’t any breakfast to eat at this hour.”

“But Aunt Rosa will hurry it if she hears us,” begged Archer. “And I want you to help me. You’re going to put your present for Mother on her plate, aren’t you? I want mine on the table, too.”

Paul hid his face in his pillow. Archer, feel-

ing a little chilly, calmly got into his brother's bed.

"I'm afraid I can't lift it so high without upsetting things, so I want you to do it for me," he explained, cuddling close to Paul. "It's unpacked. Henry took it out of the barrel yesterday. He liked it and he said he was sure Miss Elinor would. Do you know, I never thought it was funny for the servants to call Mother 'Miss' but they don't call married ladies so in Riverview. Paul, don't you think Mother'll like my present?"

It was Christmas morning and Archer's tone was wistful. Paul emerged from his pillow.

"Yes, old fellow, I'm sure she will," he said cordially. "Mothers always like things, and we've the nicest mother in the whole world, you know."

"Haven't we!" agreed Archer. "Paul, don't you like to fight with pillows? We had a fight last week at school, but a pillow got broken and Mrs. Holmes didn't feel very pleased about it. Patsy did. He loves feathers and for once he had more than he could play with. Oh, Mother's coming! Don't tell her I'm here."

Archer dove under the bedclothes. "Merry

Christmas!" called Paul, as a step paused at his door.

"Merry Christmas!" said Mrs. Arnold, looking in. "I thought I heard Archer's voice," she added, coming to kiss Paul, who promptly enveloped her in loving arms and drew her to a seat on the bed. There was a sudden upheaval of blankets and Mrs. Arnold was nearly throttled by an embrace from behind.

"Merry Christmas!" shouted Archer. "I was here! You look like a little girl with your hair in braids. Oh, Mother, won't you wear it so? Come to breakfast with it that way. I love it! Ask her to, Paul!"

"You don't look a day older than Tony," said Paul admiringly. "Let it stay so for breakfast. We want you to."

Mrs. Arnold actually blushed. "You funny boys!" she said. "All right, Archer, I'll come to breakfast with it over my shoulders but you'll let me do it up for church?"

"I'll see," said Archer mischievously. "And when will breakfast be ready? Oh, Mother, something is going to surprise you so!"

"I've asked Aunt Rosa to get breakfast at once. It will be ready as soon as we are."

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Archer bounced off the bed. "I must hurry," he said. "It's important. Paul, you *will* get up and help me, won't you? Mother, I might walk back to your room with you and then Paul will get up."

Both mother and brother laughed. "Cut along yourself," said Paul. "I'll get up in two minutes."

Archer disappeared, a little blue streak heading for his room and Paul turned to Mrs. Arnold.

"Mother, do you remember when I was about the kid's age I gave you a birthday present of a fearful brass breastpin?"

Mrs. Arnold's eyes brimmed with laughter. "Set with a red glass stone two inches long? I have it yet."

"And you wore it, like the angel you are, and never let me know what agony you suffered!"

"It wasn't exactly agony," protested Mrs. Arnold. "You gave it to me, you see."

Paul kissed her. "I just wanted to warn you," he said. "Archer has tried his hand at that trick. I knew you would rise to the occasion but if you can help it, don't even look surprised. You see, I was rash enough to express

a doubt whether you'd like it, so the kid will be suspicious. And it's likely to—to sort of hit you in the face the moment you go into the dining-room."

"I'll be prepared," said his mother. "I'm glad you warned me, for I wouldn't hurt Archer's feelings for the world."

"It's pretty bad," said Paul. "But no worse than my red glass breastpin," he conceded, generously.

It was the family custom for Mrs. Arnold to open her sons' gifts at the breakfast table and therefore refrain from entering the room until escorted by both boys. She came down in a simple white dress, her hair in two braids over her shoulders.

"Oh, Mother, you look so pretty!" said Archer, dancing to meet her. Paul had his hands full of holly and promptly stuck a twig in either braid just below his mother's ears and put a bit of mistletoe on her head.

"There, Archer, that means we can kiss Mother every time we think of it!" he exclaimed. "Breakfast is served, Mrs. Arnold. Will you take my arm?"

With a son on either side, Mrs. Arnold was

ceremoniously escorted to the dining-room where Paul threw wide the door. There was the table with its white linen and shining silver, its fragrant coffee-pot and golden grape-fruit. From the low electric light hung a Christmas bell and a glass bowl of violets stood on the side-board.

Both boys were watching their mother. Paul saw her eyes open slightly wider, but her expression never changed at sight of Archer's china cat, seated in the exact center of the round table, with a wreath of holly around its neck and a number of chocolate objects reposing at its feet.

"Why!" said Archer, himself surprised. "Paul must have put those there. Oh, Mother, it's already caught you some mice!"

Mrs. Arnold sat down in the chair Paul held for her. "Archer!" she said brightly, "I never saw a cat like that before! Where *did* you get it? And a cat capable of providing me with chocolates. Why, sonny, what a remarkable Christmas present!"

"You do like it?" asked Archer searchingly. "You'll let it sit by the library fire?"

"Like it?" said Mrs. Arnold heroically. "I

like *anything* my boys choose to give me. Indeed, it shall sit by the fire, darling! You shall choose the place you like best for it and it shall stay just exactly as long as you want it there."

Archer gave a sigh of satisfaction and when his mother released him took his seat in a state of beaming radiance. Mrs. Arnold's gaze was bent on the spray of white roses by her plate. From them she looked to her older son with eyes that held a glimmer of tears.

Archer waited patiently. There always were white roses by Mother's plate on Christmas morning; there always would be. He had been with his brother the previous evening when Paul stopped at the florist's. That Mother should look at them in a way that was both sorry and glad, and that Paul should kiss her and neither of them say one word about the roses was always a part of Christmas.

But Paul knew what Archer did not, that the little ceremony dated from the first Christmas after Mother was married. He had been scarcely older than Archer now when he realized that he was the person who must henceforth see that Mother had her Christmas roses.

"You'd better open Paul's present," sug-

gested Archer when the flowers had been tucked into Mrs. Arnold's gown.

"A tiny white box with a red ribbon and a sprig of holly. It must be another chocolate mouse!"

Archer giggled. "It'll be a baby mouse, Mother. The box is too small for a big one."

"Oh, Paul dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Arnold a moment later. "What a lovely little brooch!"

Archer sprang up to look at it. "Why, it's a flower!" he announced.

"A violet with pearl petals and a sapphire center. Paul, it's charming! Come here where I can reach you."

"You must wear it to church," said Archer admiringly. "The stone just matches your eyes. I wish—"

He cast a dubious glance at the china cat. Paul choked over his grape-fruit, but Archer's doubts were fleeting. His face was quite clear by the time he sat down.

"Come, hurry," said Paul. "I know a package that is going to make you sit up and take notice, old chap."

Some fifteen minutes later they were established on the couch in the library, Mother be-

tween the boys, and all sorts of mysterious packages before them. It was Archer's turn now.

"Which is yours, Mumsey?" he begged. "Yours first and Paul's next."

Mrs. Arnold indicated a small square package. Archer opened it eagerly and gave a squeak of delight.

"A watch! a truly silver watch!"

"A truly watch for my big boy," laughed Mrs. Arnold.

"I'll never have to ask Boy Blue the time any more," sighed Archer blissfully. "Oh, it was the thing I wanted most in the whole world. I'll never be late to breakfast now!"

Archer immediately transferred himself to his mother's lap and for several minutes showed no interest in the other packages. "It's the very nicest Christmas!" he declared when at last they were opened. "My watch and the Brownie camera Paul gave me. And dandy skates from Uncle Court and five dollars besides. And Tony's knife and this new game from Aunt Clara. And six beautiful books and two boxes of candy and fur gloves, too. Oh, Mother, you gave me the gloves and the watch and I had only one thing for you!"

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"Who came and sang a Christmas carol at my door last night?" demanded his mother. "Why, that in itself was a lovely present!"

"But it was Paul who stayed awake," confessed Archer. "I couldn't. He came and told me when it was time."

"That makes it all the nicer, sonny," declared his mother. "Now, Paul, let's look at your things."

"Open Mother's first," commanded Archer. "Another little box! But it can't be a watch because you have one. Oh, cuff-links, gold ones! Aren't they great?"

"My monogram on them, too," proclaimed Paul. "There'll be no swiping these. Thank you, Mother dearest. They're just what I wanted."

"And this fat package," said Archer. "Mother, that's from you, too? I can guess, Paul!"

"So can I. Fur gloves, but several sizes larger than yours, so you can't borrow them. Oh, thank you, Mother, they're just right. Aren't they stunners? Won't I be the envied fellow though? Now, kid, where's your package?"

“I hope you’ll like it,” said Archer eagerly.
“Tony thought you would.”

“Sure, I do!” said Paul, examining the pocket flashlight. “I really was anticipating a china kitten, but this will do just as well. It’ll be equally useful hunting for rats. I like it very much, Archer.”

“And this is from Uncle Court,” said Archer, pulling out a long package. “I know this, too. Tony told me.”

“Oh, a fishing-rod!” Paul’s eyes sparkled. “For next summer, Mother. Uncle’s promised to take Tony and me fishing in Maine. Isn’t it great!”

Paul’s eager face was bent over the jointed rod. It was perfect in every respect and was accompanied by a book of flies.

“What did Uncle give you, Mother?” asked Archer.

“The lovely new lamp in the library, dear. I needed one, you know.”

“Yes,” said Archer virtuously. “Paul and Tony broke the other. You’d better hurry, Paul, ’cause Mother has a heap of bundles, too, and it’s ’most church-time.”

Paul’s other packages were opened less de-

liberately. A crocheted silk tie from Tony, books and remembrances from other friends came to light. Archer was less interested in his mother's gifts. Lace, linen, and embroidery seemed of little value to the owner of a truly watch and other desirable masculine possessions.

Mrs. Arnold came down dressed for church and for the Christmas dinner at her brother's house. The white roses were clasped by Paul's pin. Archer noted the pin approvingly, with another fleeting feeling of regret. If he had chanced to see that brooch, perhaps he would have left the china cat upon the top shelf of the village store. As for the roses, they always went to church. That, too, was a part of Christmas.

"Mother," asked Paul laughingly, "won't you give me back the pin with the red stone now?"

"Never!" said Mrs. Arnold. "That pin is one of my choicest possessions. Some day, Paul, when you bring me a daughter, if I love her very, very much, I'll give her that pin. But in no other way will you ever get it!"

After service, Uncle Court, Aunt Clara and

Tony gave them a glad welcome. Cousins from near and far gathered for the big, hospitable dinner, followed by games and fun. About five, Mrs. Arnold and the boys left the festivities for a little. Not far away was the Children's Hospital, and to visit it was a yearly custom.

Paul carried a big basket of flowers and Mrs. Arnold moved from one bed to another, with a smile and a pleasant word for each child, bestowing a rose here, a carnation there. Then Archer stood by his mother's side and sang.

"Once in royal David's city," was his choice for the first ward, and the second heard, "Oh, little town of Bethlehem." The third room contained the tiniest invalids of all. Archer hesitated.

"They're so little," he said, turning to his mother. Mrs. Arnold bent and whispered something. Archer's face cleared.

"Away in a manger, no crib for his bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head,"

he sang softly, and the weary babies lay still to listen.

"I wish they weren't sick and didn't have to stay in bed," he said pensively as they left the hospital. "But perhaps they have some

nice times. Every one had a plaything."

"Just think of the kind nurses and doctors who are helping them get well," said Mrs. Arnold brightly.

"Yes-s," remarked Archer thoughtfully. "But they wanted *you*, Mother. They said it with their eyes."

"That's true," assented Paul. "Poor little kids!"

The three returned to Mr. Arnold's home for the Christmas games that occupied the evening. Nine o'clock found Archer sleepy and tired.

"Paul," said Mrs. Arnold, drawing him aside for a moment. "I think I'll go home now with Archer. He's had such an exciting day. But there's no reason why you should leave. Stay as long as you choose."

"This family sticks together on Christmas," replied Paul. "It's too small to divide, and there'll be enough going on the rest of the vacation anyway. We'll put the kid to bed and you and I will finish the evening by the library fire. I'll even smile at the china cat. I really prefer to come with you, Mother. I wish you could know what it means to a fellow to have you to come home to."

CHAPTER XV

AFTER VACATION

AFTER the holidays the school returned to a snow-covered campus. Christmas week had favored Riverview with a severe storm, burying the country for more than two feet in places. The river was useless for skating, but snow-shoeing and skiing were at their best. Sleds were sported by the Nursery and double-runners were not despised by the Upper school.

Archer desired both sled and snow-shoes, but recalling Paul's caustic comments on his Christmas shopping, prudently sought his brother's advice.

"If I were you, I'd get only the sled," Paul suggested. "If you buy snow-shoes to fit you now, you'll outgrow them soon. Anyway, I don't believe you have money enough for both."

"Well," said Archer. "I have my allowance for this month; that's a whole dollar, and I have the five dollars Uncle Court gave me at Christmas."

“But you don’t want to blow it all in at once. It’ll be no fun being strapped till the first of February, and you know you mustn’t borrow nor get things on tick. Two dollars will buy a good sled and I’d make that do for this winter. You’ve skates and a hockey stick. Won’t those answer?”

Archer decided that they would. His brother good-naturedly agreed to meet him at the village shop where a really fine assortment of athletic goods was displayed.

Paul had returned to school in a happier and more normal frame of mind. Beginning with his own thoughts that night while listening to the Christmas music, a change had gradually come over his attitude toward life. Home environment and holiday fun, combined with Tony’s congenial companionship, all contributed to make him see things in a truer perspective. He and his cousin had more than carried out their proposed programme of diversion. Several glorious gallops and two fine concerts were added to the strictly social gaieties planned. He came back for the winter term resolved to think no more of the football season, to keep himself in a state of perfect indifference

as regarded Patterson's conduct, either past or future, and not to care in the least who obtained the Chase prize.

Archer, Bryan, and Tommy were on hand at the time appointed. Paul approved the choice of a fine flexible flyer and then invited all three small boys to have ice-cream at the "Grub Shop."

Since this palace of enjoyment was farther down the street, Archer's sled was left to be called for on the way back. The beginning of a new term found the school well supplied with pocket money so the Grub Shop showed a large patronage.

Ordering their ices, the boys stood around, seeing no immediate chance of seats. As the last of the three took his brimming glass Paul caught a glance from Patterson, who was sitting near by. In spite of his recent resolutions, something in its expression annoyed him. Why shouldn't he treat all the Nursery kids if he liked? What was there to sneer at?

The three little boys had found a table, and Paul, though he had not intended to stay, ordered a chocolate soda for himself and deliberately joined his guests. Presently Phil Lan-

sing appeared, extracted an ice from the over-busy clerk and promptly attached himself to their party, ignoring all invitations from other quarters.

“Say, Gabriel, can’t a shadowy person like me go halves on a chair? Oh, don’t get up; there’s plenty of room.”

“Unpacked yet?” asked Paul.

“Unpacked!” groaned Lansing. “There isn’t room in the study to put a postage stamp. Say what I can, Harry won’t quit turning things around. Came in last night to find my bed upside down,—head where the foot ought to be. When I looked pathetic, he threw things. I never saw anybody like Harry; he sits up all night, beginning with the time he goes to bed. Are you game for another, kids? Have one on me?”

“Don’t,” said Paul. “They’ll be tied up in knots to-night.”

“Oh, no, they won’t. Their tummies can stand more than that—”

The chair that Lansing and Archer were sharing suddenly tipped. Archer sprang to his feet but the older boy went flat on the floor.

"Look out!" laughed Paul, seizing his own glass and Lansing's.

The warning came too late. Struggling to straighten his long legs, Lansing managed to hit the table. Archer's dish was empty, so was Tommy's, but Bryan had been more deliberate. The remainder of his half-eaten ice slid into Lansing's face and trickled down his neck.

The howl of laughter that arose from the Grub Shop moved even its seasoned proprietor to mirth. So long as nothing was broken he could afford to join in the amusement, and Lansing was an absurd spectacle. Only the three little boys looked solemn.

"Here, give us a wet towel!" said Paul, controlling his mirth at last and turning to the clerk behind the counter. "Phil, you giddy ass, if you could only see yourself now, you'd quit playing the goat."

Lansing buried his face in the welcome towel, mopped his hair, ran a finger gingerly around the top of his collar and shrugged his shoulders.

"Vaudeville's over, fellows!" he remarked cheerfully. "Smile, you kids. We'll all have another."

The three looked at him wonderingly. Who but Lansing could have come out of a trying and difficult situation so triumphantly? All those big boys had howled with laughter,—and Lansing didn't care! Here was a character worthy of admiration, courage to be emulated!

The older boys left them at the door and the trio turned slowly back toward school, passing on their way the Town Hall.

It was an ugly brick building of a type of architecture common in New England. Upon its exterior were signs of different public offices.

"Tax Collector, Town Clerk, Police Station, Superintendent of Schools," read Archer.

Tommy suddenly stopped. "Down in the basement," he said in an awed voice, "is a prison. A fellow told me so. There are places where they lock people up!"

"What for?" asked Boy Blue.

"Getting drunk, I suppose," said Tommy, whose knowledge of the world's evil comprised no more serious sin.

"Let's go down and see what it looks like," proposed Archer.

This audacious suggestion made the others gasp. "Do we dare?" asked Bryan.

"Pummy never told us not to," said Tommy.

"No," replied Archer, "but he did tell me the other day that I thought of too many things he didn't."

"Well, that's his lookout," decreed Bryan. "He ought to think of 'em first. Let's go. It can be a pirate expedition to see whether we shall put our next prisoners there."

The three reconnoitered the building with professional precaution. To storm the Town Hall in the very face of an unsuspecting populace was an adventure worthy of their mettle. After careful discussion, the door labeled "Superintendent of Schools" was chosen as the point of assault.

"What'll you do if we meet the Superintendent?" inquired the prudent Tommy, desirous to be prepared for all emergencies.

"Ask if he wants an office boy," replied Archer promptly, his imagination quickened by a recent visit to his uncle's place of business.

The door cautiously opened, disclosed a narrow empty corridor with a door on either side.

One at the right bore the legend: Superintendent's Office; the other at the left was as plainly marked Cellar.

With due care Archer turned its handle. Fortune favored their expedition. The door was not locked and the next moment three small boys were creeping down the stairs as noiselessly as boys alone can move when they really wish to be quiet. Strange that this faculty should lie latent in even the noisiest of little boys!

The stairs ended in an open, airy cemented cellar. At one side a partition shut off fuel and heating apparatus, on the other were lockers, toilet rooms and—yes,—two cells with grated doors!

On tiptoe, the professional pirates continued their scouting trip. The wariest of janitors could not have suspected their presence.

The cell into which they looked was clean, untenanted, furnished only with the frame of a bed and a chair. It was lighted by a small, high, barred window through which they could see the feet of passers-by.

Silently they stole to the door of the other cell, but scarcely had they reached it when some-

thing stirred in the darkest corner. The boys caught a single glimpse of a disreputable-looking man seated on the bed.

With one accord they took to their heels. No janitor could have stopped them, no town authority have held them. They tumbled up the stairs, stampeded along the corridor and burst through the outer door, leaving it open wide to the weather.

Nor did they stop on reaching the street. Forgetting the sled, they tore on their panic-stricken way. Even failing breath and lessening strength only slightly slackened their pace. They did not know they had overtaken Paul and Lansing until the older boys hailed them. Recognizing his brother, Archer fairly flung himself at him.

“What’s got these infants?” asked Lansing, for Tommy was frantically clutching the belt of his Mackinaw, and fright was as plainly written on Bryan’s face. “Who scared you? Tell me and I’ll go back and lay him out.”

The trio, panting for breath, literally could not speak. When they did manage to gasp a fragmentary tale, they were unprepared for a mighty burst of laughter.

"You little idiots!" said Paul at length. Lansing, quite overcome by mirth, was sitting in a pile of snow. "How on earth *could* the man get you if he was locked in?"

The pirates looked at one another. Fear had been abroad in the cellar of the Riverview Town Hall, and before her shadowy form common-sense took wing.

"Well, he couldn't!" Tommy conceded with a sickly grin.

Archer lifted a tumbled head from Paul's coat. "I never thought of that," he acknowledged. "It was a dreadful experience. What was he locked up for? You're mean to laugh!"

"Probably a bum on a bust," said Lansing, wiping his eyes. "As for laughing, did you see me when I lay on the floor with ice-cream trickling down my spine and forty fellows pointing the finger of scorn at me? And did I turn a hair?"

He didn't and they had admired him.

"Well, I don't care," said Archer, drawing a long breath. "I suppose it is funny. Of course, if we'd stopped to think, we'd know that he wouldn't stay there if he could get out. I'll go back now and get my sled."

“Served you jolly well right for poking around in a place where you ought not to be,” said Paul, feeling that his position as older brother required him to improve the occasion.

“What did you go down there for?”

The pirates again looked at one another.

“We went,” replied Archer with gentle courtesy, “on very important private business!”

CHAPTER XVI

“ALICE IN WONDERLAND”

MID-YEAR examinations a thing of the past, the Sanderson gave a minstrel show. Foster, not to be outdone, announced a presentation of Alice in Wonderland. Started as a joke, the affair finally aroused so much interest that it assumed the proportions of a full-fledged theatrical performance.

Mr. Barrows watched its development with amused approval. The winter term, bringing frequent bad weather and consequent curtailment of outdoor sports, was always the trying one of the year. Any innocent diversion keeping the boys happy and busy in leisure moments was welcomed by a housemaster.

Foster decided that the affair must be properly staged. The house took up a collection and appointed a committee to see about costumes. Lansing and Colquhoun, having paid a visit to town, returned in a state of excitement to report

that for a moderate sum they could rent a complete set made purposely for the play.

The cast held another council and adjourned to invade Mr. Barrows' study. He heard their proposals with a smile.

"Well," he said, tipping back in his swivel chair. "I understand that you want to rent the Town Hall, throw the performance open to the public, charge a small admission fee to cover expenses, and devote any profits to some charitable purpose. Is that it?"

"That's exactly it," said Preston Lawrence. "Of course, we'll ask the Doctor, too."

"Oh, he'll approve. Anything like this and your annual concert tends to promote good feeling between the school and the village. But are you prepared to give people their money's worth?"

"Mr. Barrows," said Lansing solemnly, "if you could but witness my subtle interpretation of the character of the Cheshire Cat!"

"I should certainly expect it to be a star performance, Phil," Mr. Barrows replied with equal gravity. "But your play as a whole must be good."

"Consider the cast," Lansing went on.

“Perry does the Duchess. Such a classy peer-ess never stepped the boards before! Malcolm excels as the Gryphon, and to hear Paul sing the song of the Mock Turtle would bring tears to the eyes of a brass monkey. Sturgis is to be Alice. Skirts and a wig will turn him into a regular peach! Then there’s the Hatter and the Dormouse,—Clifford and Shoestrings, you know. Wonders, both! But the gem of the menagerie, always excepting the Cat, of course, is Pops as the March Hare. Being half mad to begin with—”

Preston himself cut short this flood of eloquence by calmly ramming a handkerchief into the speaker’s mouth. “Shut up, dear one!” he said soothingly. “Mr. Barrows,” he went on, “we’ll give you a rehearsal to-morrow night. Of course Phil can’t be judged by any standards of ordinary sanity, but you’ll see for yourself how the rest of us show up.”

“Agreed!” said the housemaster merrily.

This private exhibition resulted in cordial approval from Mr. Barrows and a promise to report their project favorably to the Doctor. Almost before they knew it, the actors found

themselves scheduled for a real performance in behalf of the local Charity association, saw their coming prowess blazoned in shop windows and on bulletin boards.

On the appointed evening, the Town Hall held a big and varied audience. All the little boys from Clarke House as well as the Upper school were allowed to attend, faculty ladies came out in full force, and a large gathering of village people was present, including many children.

Foster had decided to keep the affair entirely to its own membership. At first, Sturgis declined to play Alice, and they proposed to borrow Archer Arnold, a suggestion at once turned down by both Paul and Mr. Barrows, who agreed that the part was too exacting and the excitement too much for a little fellow. Sturgis was finally induced to reconsider. Between actors, ushers, ticket-takers, curtain-raisers, and prompter, some share in the project was found for every one of Foster's thirty occupants.

Raymond, the artistic, acted as stage manager. Under his planning the curtain rose upon a scene charming enough to bring a murmur of

pleased approval from the audience. Before them lay an empty garden with rose-covered trellises and potted plants in orderly beds.

Alice came tripping on the stage to be received with shouts of laughing applause. A pretty girl was Sturgis, with his fresh young face looking out between long golden curls. The little pink frock, white apron and ankle-ties were exactly those of the familiar illustrations. He was small and slender enough to pass criticism, but the bare arms, protruding from short lace-trimmed sleeves, showed no girlish curves, only well-developed muscles, and ended in the unmistakable hands of a boy.

The actors had wisely decided to present a simple arrangement of the fairy tale, rather a series of scenes than a connected play, requiring little change of setting and few stage properties. The charm of the affair lay in the familiarity of the audience with the story and their delight at seeing the different characters appear in life-like guise. The costumes alone would have carried off a poorer presentation, but to do the boys justice, dialogue and acting were both spirited and good. The spectators, listening with anticipative pleasure for the non-

sense that has grown beloved to the whole world, greeted each familiar joke with glee.

The White Rabbit trotted about in search of gloves and fan, the Fish and Frog footmen stood solemnly outside the door of the Duchess, and each successive character was hailed with affection. The Duchess towered six feet tall, broad in proportion, and wore a surpassingly ugly mask. According to precedent, she peppered the baby but with unexpected results, for the Cheshire Cat, anxious to preserve the literal text of the tale, had slyly put pepper into a supposedly empty pot.

With the howls of the joyful audience mingled the sneezes of the wrathful Duchess. Alice, forgetting her proper rôle, indulged in an impish grin. The spectators sat up. Things not on the programme might evidently be anticipated.

Presently among the roses, materialized the Cheshire Cat. Its eagerly awaited advent was the signal for a rising tide of amusement. Only its white plush mask showed through the opening, displaying a grin stretching literally from ear to ear. Then came its remarkable conversation with Alice as it disappeared and reappeared to the end of the scene.

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As the curtain fell, the school orchestra began to play. Without the least warning, the curtain suddenly shot up, revealing the Duchess chastising the Cheshire Cat in the center of the stage. Though the curtain was instantly jerked down, this glimpse of merited discipline behind the scenes stirred the audience to unbounded enthusiasm.

Next came the Mad Tea-Party. On a narrow bench behind a rickety green table, sat the Hatter and the March Hare, drinking tea and using the Dormouse for a cushion. Alice, wandering in, took her seat at the table's end.

At sight of the March Hare, the children squealed with pleasure. His mask was perfect even to the time-honored straws around the ears. And there sat the furry Dormouse, its pointed nose and sleepy head almost in its tea-cup! There sat the Hatter, large as life, with a huge price ticket stuck in his hat-band!

Perhaps the excited Hare and Hatter did not realize just how vigorously they were "roughing" the Dormouse. Not naturally of a meek or patient disposition, and nearly suffocated by its heavy hot fur head, it endured almost to the end of the scene and then "awoke" with a

vengeance. Selecting a soft spot in the March Hare it administered a vicious pinch.

The Hare had just urged Alice to "take some more tea." It emphasized the invitation by suddenly leaping into the air.

Hatter and Dormouse only just saved themselves from going over backward, bench and all. Alice clutched the table, but the tea service was beyond her reach. With china crashing it slid to the floor.

For a second the actors were taken aback, but the situation was saved by the Cheshire Cat. That astute animal had no business whatever to come upon the stage at that moment, but in it padded, clad in a white plush suit with high white boots and a wonderful tail. Down upon all fours it went and began to lap milk from the scattered crockery.

"Clever work!" laughed Mr. Barrows to his next neighbor.

"Didn't they mean to do it?" asked Mr. Pomeroy under cover of the uproarious mirth.

"No," said Mr. Barrows, "but thanks to the Cat, hardly anybody in the audience knows it."

The Cat, once on the stage, remained. It had no earthly business there, but it waved its tail,

sat down and rubbed leather-palmed paws over its head, washing its face in a touchingly realistic manner. The March Hare threw a piece of bread at it; Alice administered a surreptitious and deplorably unladylike kick, but the Cat merely purred the louder.

By this time, it was impossible to hear a word that was spoken, for the wildly amused children could not be suppressed. Alice left the tea-party in disdain and the curtain fell.

The next and final act introduced the Gryphon and the Mock Turtle. During the interval the audience had become calm. The Cat was not visible when the curtain rose, but certain suspicious sounds from the left wing indicated that it was being kept there only by force.

The Gryphon and the sorrowful Mock Turtle, who with tears and sobs told his tale, confounded poor Alice by their description of the school in the sea, a narrative received with chuckles and ripples of laughter from the Lower school boys. Then they passed to the Lobster Quadrille and the Mock Turtle began his solo.

“‘Will you walk a little faster? said a whiting to a snail.’”

Silently from either wing stole the other members of the cast, Duchess, footmen, White Rabbit, Dormouse and all. The Cat, released from imprisonment, was recklessly whisking its tail. Hand in hand they stood in two lines behind the trio already on the stage. The Mock Turtle continued his song in a voice charming in quality if not so remarkable as his little brother's. As he finished the first stanza, the chorus was taken up by the others, dancing forward and backward as they sang. In front danced Alice between Gryphon and Mock Turtle.

Just as the Mock Turtle began the third stanza, the Cat, escaping from the custody of the March Hare, stole toward the footlights.

"The farther off from England, the nearer is to France!"

sang the Turtle.

To the unspeakable delight of the younger portion of the audience and to the evident consternation of both soloist and chorus, the Cheshire Cat suddenly bounced off the stage. Waving its white plush paws and switching its tail, it prowled down the center aisle. Shrieks of joy greeted its approach. Half the audience

promptly turned to see what it was going to do.

Hand on heart, the Cat made a ceremonious bow to a lady it had never seen before, then turned to a group of grinning small boys from the Nursery. Archer on the end of the seat looked at it somewhat dubiously,—Archer still believed in fairy tales. An affable paw was presented, but Archer, recognizing those merry eyes, gave the Cat a sudden hug that twisted its head askew.

Not at all disconcerted, it adjusted its mask and continued its lawless excursion. It shook hands solemnly with an awe-struck small boy, patted the village minister on the head, chucked a little girl under the chin, hit a scoffing sixth-former a whack with its tail. Then at full speed it galloped back, the children screaming with glee as it passed.

A few rows from the front, Dr. and Mrs. Hilton were sitting with their little five-year-old son. Jack, standing on the settee, was fairly jumping up and down with excitement over this marvelous animal.

The Cat materialized at his very side. Jack stared. Unlike any cat he knew, it possessed

smiling blue eyes. Also, it spoke the English language.

The next second, Mrs. Hilton in real dismay, grasped her husband's arm. The Cheshire Cat with her precious Jack on its shoulder had bounded back upon the stage!

"Oh, John, how could you! Who is it, anyway?"

"I haven't an idea!" laughed Dr. Hilton, immensely diverted by the whole affair. "Jack seemed to know. He never thought of not going."

One arm tightly clasping the Cat's neck, his eyes big and round, his cheeks pink, Jack found himself surrounded by the real creatures of the fairy tale. The audience was howling with mirth. If anything were being said or sung upon the stage no one could hear a word.

"Barrows, who *is* that Cat?" demanded Dr. Hilton, leaning forward. The actors had chosen to remain strictly anonymous and no names appeared on the programme.

For very laughter Mr. Barrows could not answer. The Cat and Jack were now doing a killing cake-walk, the Gryphon and Mock Turtle mimicking them. Presently up sailed the

Duchess. Jack, not liking her hideous mask, buried his face on the Cat's shoulder. At that very second came a lull in the applause.

"Take your ugly mug away!" ordered the Cat in a voice that, due to the sudden quiet, was audible all over the hall.

Some of the younger boys were actually in hysterics and this unexpected interpolation reduced a number of older people to the same state of helplessness. The chorus, seeing that the performance was over so far as any further adherence to the text was concerned, joined hands and began to dance in a circle around the Cat and Jack. The orchestra struck up the familiar tune of "St. Stephen's" and soon the words became audible.

"But, John, *who* has got Jacky?" implored Mrs. Hilton.

"He's having the time of his life," laughed the principal. "Is it Lansing, Barrows?"

Mr. Barrows managed to nod assent.

"I thought so! Nobody but Phil could carry that off. Look at him!"

Quiet again restored, the Cat volunteered a solo.

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"We'll sing for old St. Stephen's,
Whose hill-tops touch the sky!
We'll sing for Jacky Hilton
Who'll go there by and by!"

A shriek of joy from the ecstatically blissful Jack greeted this effusion and the school took up the chorus. The next second the Cat suddenly stopped its antics.

"What's the matter?" inquired Mrs. Hilton. The March Hare had transferred Jack to his shoulder and the Cat sat down on the boards where it remained, brushing its ears and occasionally growling, while the rest continued to dance about it.

The March Hare, skipping off the stage, restored the hero of a wonderful adventure to his anxious mother.

"What's happened to the Cat?" asked Dr. Hilton, detaining him by a touch.

"Twisted his game ankle," whispered the Hare, flying back to join in the final "hands all round."

Cries of disappointment arose from the children as the Cat still sat on the floor. Realizing this, it rose with an evident effort. Hare and Mock Turtle seized it by either paw and

such a dance on one foot as that Cat executed was never witnessed before! The Gryphon stumbled and lost off his head, calmly arose and continued without it; Alice's wig flew off, revealing a closely cropped boyish crown, and finally the curtain fell,—fell before an audience literally exhausted by laughter.

CHAPTER XVII

A QUEER PROBLEM

“OF all the fool things I ever did, that Cat was the worst ever!” growled Lansing a week later. “Three days in the infirmary and crutches now is the absolute limit. And on top of that I’ll be called Puss to the end of my earthly career.”

“Pussy dear,” said Paul soothingly, “we’ve always known you aren’t so funny as you are foolish. But the fooliest thing that anybody did that night was done by sweet Alice after Barrows ordered you off to the infirmary. Sturgis put vaseline on his face to take off his make-up.”

“Of course!” said Lansing scornfully. “Nothing but grease will start it.”

“True, oh, Cheshire Puss! But Sturgis swiped the tube from Gay’s room and didn’t read the label carefully. In about a minute there was something doing! It was capsicum

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vaseline, you see. Such language as our gentle Alice used!"

"Wish I'd seen that!" laughed Phil.

"Alice was slightly peeved but the rest of us rejoiced unholily. You made the hit of your life though with the kids. Archer and Boy Blue half believe you really were the only and original Cheshire Cat."

"And it was a howling success as to tin," put in Harry. "All expenses paid and fifty-odd dollars cleared. It's gone to the village tuberculosis committee. They were more than pleased and the Doctor was tickled to death."

"I did rattle his slats," said Phil more cheerfully. "Oh, well! Only that old frog, Dr. Cary, says this is the second time I've done for that ankle and he won't swear I can come out for the team next fall."

"We'll slay Dr. Cary before that date," said Paul. "Cheer up, now, or I'll call in the whole house to see our Cheshire Cat with a grouch on."

"Oh, don't be a bromide," growled Lansing. "Say, Barrows just told me that the Chase essays are back from the judges."

A murmur of interest went around Study 18,

where the "crowd" was waiting for the summons to dinner.

"Didn't mention who got it?" asked Alex.

"Didn't know himself. Said he was going to look them over with the Doctor the first chance they could get, probably to-morrow. I suppose we'll know soon after that."

"I'll bet Barry himself is busting to find out," remarked Harry.

"Sure!" said Phil. "Out of consideration for the rest of you, I didn't compete. Rejoice, give thanks and sing! But Barry is human and he wants the prize for his house, same as last year."

In truth, Mr. Barrows did hope that one of his boys would get the prize and was decidedly curious concerning the winner. Not until the following evening did a moment come when he and Dr. Hilton were both free to look over the essays. As soon as dinner was over, Mr. Barrows appeared at the office.

"Ripley writes that the choice of the judges was made independently and that all three voted for the same essay," began Dr. Hilton. "He says they consider it an unusual piece of work for a young boy, shows remarkable grasp

of subject and original thought. Here it is: 'The Conservation of Our Natural Resources.' The pseudonym is 'Ajax.' You have the sealed envelopes with the real names?"

Mr. Barrows laid the packet on the desk. "That looks like Arnold's writing," he said, examining the prize essay eagerly. "Still, it may not be. Ajax! I'll find the envelope."

"What's that?" asked Dr. Hilton abruptly, raising his head to listen to an uproar of shouting somewhere on the campus.

"Something has broken loose," he added, stepping into the outer office to open the door. He came back smiling. "The disturbance seems to be in Foster. About fifteen megaphones are shouting in unison: 'We want Barrows!'"

"My house!" exclaimed the instructor. "My good, well-behaved kids! What's my House-president doing?"

"From the noise, I should judge he was yelling with the rest," replied Dr. Hilton imperturbably.

Mr. Barrows suddenly laughed. "Excuse me while I run over and speak to them. It's all my fault. They wanted to skate this evening

and I said I'd tell them after dinner whether they might. Came over here and never thought of it. Naturally, they are calling upon high heaven for justice!"

Dr. Hilton smiled as his assistant hurried into the night. He wished his staff boasted more men like Barrows. The amusement deepened on his face as the clamor changed to a cheer, succeeded by silence and then a whoop of joy.

"Nice children!" remarked Mr. Barrows approvingly, coming in after another moment. "They politely said they were howling not only for permission to go, but because they wanted me to go with them. Everybody's promised to come in at half-past nine. Let me see. I was looking for 'Ajax' wasn't I? Here it is! Well,—I'll be hanged! George R. Patterson!"

At sight of his disconcerted face Dr. Hilton burst out laughing. "If you could see yourself—" he began, but suddenly grew grave. "Why, the penmanship of this card isn't quite the same as that of the essay. Yes, it is. No, it isn't, either!"

"Oh, I remember," exclaimed Mr. Barrows, his face clearing. "There are two essays with

the same subject and the same pseudonym. I noticed that when they were handed in. Here's the other envelope marked 'Ajax.' This is the one belonging to the essay."

Mr. Barrows leaned over to compare the writing. "That's it,—yes, beyond a doubt."

"The two are very similar," said Dr. Hilton, "but this seems nearer than the first. Odd that two should be alike both in subject and choice of pseudonym. Open it," he added mischievously. "I hope for your sake it is the name you want it to be."

Mr. Barrows slit the envelope and gave a sigh of satisfaction. "Paul Courtland Arnold," he read. "Well, I'll admit I am glad. You know we all thought there was something fishy about the way those match games went last fall. I felt if Paul got this prize, it would help to make up for his disappointment then. Patterson never gave Paul a fair show, Doctor!"

"I know you thought so, and I'll agree that there was something queer in Patterson's attitude," said Dr. Hilton. "This is a good essay. It's well done! Now, let's look at Patterson's. He should have turned out fine work too, but the

judges haven't even given him honorable mention."

Dr. Hilton, glancing over Paul's carefully thought-out paper did not notice Mr. Barrows' proceedings. When he looked up after some moments, the competing essays were laid in two rows on the flat top of the desk, each with the corresponding small envelope upon it. Conspicuously by itself lay the card of the second Ajax.

"Do you see how this has worked out, Doctor?" inquired Mr. Barrows in a peculiar tone. "There is no essay for Patterson's card. Can the judges have mislaid it?"

"Impossible," said the principal briefly, after a quick survey of the situation. "Ripley counted them in my presence when he took them and again when he returned the package. There were twenty-seven."

"There are and always have been twenty-eight cards. Twenty-eight essays were handed to me."

A pause ensued, during which the eyes of the two men met across the desk.

"Do you remember that Patterson handed

you an essay?" inquired the principal, breaking a silence full of unspoken thought.

"Distinctly. I recall thinking that he and Paul were again competing for the same honor. I could not name offhand all the boys who brought me papers, but I remember positively both Arnold and Patterson. At the time, I did not notice their pseudonyms. The essays were all handed to me at noon on the day they were due."

"And Ripley took them the next morning," soliloquized Dr. Hilton. "Where were they between those hours?"

"I took them to my study and locked them in my desk," Mr. Barrows replied, thinking aloud. "It was Wednesday, a half-holiday. I did not open the desk again until I came in after five. Then I sorted the essays and compared them with the sealed envelopes. They corresponded, twenty-eight of each. It was then that I noticed that there were two 'Ajaxes' and that their essays were on the same subject. When I went to dinner, I closed the desk-lid. Next morning, I placed the cards in a drawer and brought the essays here to the office."

“But they were on your desk all the evening. Did any of the boys come in?”

“Oh, bless me, probably every boy in my house! But no one could have meddled with them. It wasn’t possible, Doctor. The boys came in and out and lounged around my fire, but no one could have interfered with my desk. Whoever took that essay took an especial one and took time to find the one he wanted. It isn’t probable that any fellow sorted that package of papers with me in the room, even though I might have been talking with some one else.”

“No, it isn’t,” agreed Dr. Hilton. “But what of the time just before dinner, after you had checked up the essays? The package was there in your study. Could any one have had access to it then?”

“Deliver a busy man from remembering what happened on any especial afternoon!” groaned Mr. Barrows. “Let me think. Wednesday, the eleventh. Was that the day Lawrence’s mother came? No, that was the week before.”

Mr. Barrows relapsed into silence, his head in his hands. The matter was no small affair.

After some moments of thought, he looked up.

“Doctor, if I remember rightly, I left my study during that hour before dinner to call a long-distance telephone number. I have reason for knowing it was that afternoon, since it was to arrange a personal engagement. I was gone perhaps ten minutes. When I came back, I found two notes on my desk. One Mrs. Holmes had sent over from Clarke. I did not know who brought it. The other was a notice left by Paul Arnold.”

“Did he leave it personally?” Dr. Hilton asked quietly.

“Yes, for later in the evening, he spoke to me about it. Dr. Hilton!” the younger man exclaimed, springing to his feet. “You are not thinking *that*, are you? Paul is incapable of it!”

“Not for one minute, Barrows. Do sit down. I am only trying to foresee what other people may think about it. Patterson and Arnold are rivals of long standing. There hasn't been particularly good feeling between them, especially since those unlucky football games, which Patterson probably did help to lose out of spite to Arnold. Given the slight chance that Arnold

recognized his rival's penmanship or knew the identical subject and pseudonym,—it was a pretty little opportunity for revenge.”

“He didn't do it!” Mr. Barrows insisted indignantly. “I know Paul too well to believe that of him. He *couldn't* do it! Nothing will ever make me think he did!”

“Now, don't blow up, Barrows,” protested Dr. Hilton, amused by this vehement defense in spite of the gravity of the affair. “I'm merely stating the way things will appear. We may leave out of the question the little lad who brought the matron's message; he could have known nothing of the essays nor their importance. The thing was done by some one who knew exactly what he was doing.”

“It is perfectly possible that other boys came during the time I was in the telephone booth.”

“Granted. But the one person who might seem to have an object in removing Patterson's essay *did* come.”

“True!” sighed Mr. Barrows. “But he came openly and spoke openly of his errand.”

“Cheer up!” said Dr. Hilton quickly. “Not for one second do I believe Paul guilty. But it is what Patterson will think, and we must

admit that circumstantial evidence gives him some reason. If only Paul hadn't won the prize! That makes it still more of a complication."

"What a mess!" groaned Mr. Barrows, disconsolately. "I sincerely wish that Madam Chase had never instituted that contest."

"I almost wish so myself," sighed the principal. "We'll postpone any announcement about the prize. If we can find a way to clear things up without causing a school scandal we must do it. Paul's card apparently belongs to the prize essay, but the penmanship is similar and there is just a chance that it is Patterson's. We shall have to find out definitely which of the two boys did write the essay that has been awarded the prize."

CHAPTER XVIII

STILL UNSOLVED

ON coming down stairs next morning, Paul found two notes on the house bulletin board. One was plainly from the office, since it was addressed by the principal's secretary. Tearing it open, he read Dr. Hilton's desire to see him at twelve.

"What can he want of me?" Paul thought, honestly amazed. Think as he might, he could imagine no reason for this interview. A sudden idea crossed his mind. Could it concern the Chase prize? But last year, when Alex won it, no one had known until the result was announced in chapel. Well, time would show, and certainly he had nothing on his conscience that need make him dread a summons to the Doctor's presence.

He opened the other note, written in Archer's sprawling chirography.

"DEAR PAUL:

"I am in the Infirmary because my throat is sore. Dr. Cary says it is Tonsillitis. I can't

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see any of the boys. Only Patsy can stay with me and he won't. He goes away every time he can. There is a nice lady here who is the nurse. I can't say her name but she says I may call her Miss Ruth. I have to stay in bed. My throat aches pretty bad. I wish I could see you.

“ARCHER.”

In spite of his regret at the little brother's indisposition, Paul smiled over the letter, for it was written with a red pencil, evidently provided for the cheering of the invalid.

“Too bad!” he thought as he went into chapel. “I suppose he won't be allowed to see anybody for some time. I'll rake up a book he'll like, and Alex has some picture puzzles he'll let him take. Hope the Imp isn't too ill to amuse himself.”

Between chapel and his first recitation, Paul made a flying dash to Dr. Cary's office, to learn that Archer had a bad throat and would feel worse before he was any better. Complete isolation was to be enforced.

When Paul entered the office ante-room at the appointed hour, he was surprised to meet Mr. Barrows. Thinking that his own appointment must give way to the needs of a master,

he hesitated, but Mr. Barrows beckoned to him.

"We're both wanted," he remarked, thus adding to Paul's mystification.

Dr. Hilton looked grave and preoccupied. Mr. Barrows sat down by the desk and the principal motioned Paul to a seat on the other side.

"There are some questions that we want to ask you," he began. "First, which of these two envelopes is yours?"

Paul promptly indicated one of the two Ajaxes.

"Do you know the penmanship of the other?"

"No, sir," was the reply after a careful scrutiny. "It might belong to any one of a dozen fellows."

"Well, is this your essay?"

"Yes, sir, it is," said Paul, giving the sheets a glance and then lifting his eyes to the serious faces of the two men. Without knowing why, he felt vaguely disturbed.

Dr. Hilton did not speak immediately. "Paul," he said at length, "something rather inexplicable has happened. It chanced that another person besides yourself chose Ajax for

a pseudonym, and also by chance handed in an essay on the same subject as yours. That other essay has disappeared."

Paul looked surprised and puzzled but not a trace of other emotion crossed his face. To both observers, had they ever thought otherwise, his complete ignorance of the fate of that essay was convincing.

"That is strange," he said, feeling that some reply was expected.

"It is strange and also peculiarly unfortunate," went on Dr. Hilton, "because the missing essay belongs to George Patterson."

Still no look of comprehension on Paul's face, only a deepening bewilderment.

"The judges have awarded the prize to this essay, which is yours. They never saw the one that probably would have been your closest rival."

As he ended, Dr. Hilton looked straight into Paul's face with a slight smile.

"Never saw it? What became of it?" asked the boy in surprise.

"On the appointed day it was handed to Mr. Barrows. It was not among the essays when they were given to the judges. Somehow on

the afternoon or evening of the eleventh of December, it disappeared from Mr. Barrows' study."

"Yes?" said Paul politely. Something in the principal's face suddenly struck him. He turned pale. "Oh!" he exclaimed, springing to his feet. "Patterson's essay! Dr. Hilton, did you think that of me?"

"No, Paul, I do not. Sit down and keep cool. I am perfectly certain that you neither know nor have known anything about it. I called you in chiefly to be absolutely sure that the one that was left was yours. Do you think it possible that any one could have thought he was doing you a kindness by taking the other essay?"

"A mighty short-sighted kindness!" said Paul bitterly. "But no friend of mine could know what subject Patterson chose nor have picked out his essay."

"It might be possible for some one to ascertain Patterson's subject if he had a real interest in finding out," said Dr. Hilton. "I suggest that as a possible solution, but as a matter of fact, any one who took the essay, would, I should suppose, have been clever enough to

take the corresponding small envelope also. Had that been done, the chances are that the theft might never have come to light. We have not always returned the unsuccessful essays, Barrows?"

"Not always, usually only to the fellows who asked for them. To have taken the envelope containing the real name would have greatly lessened the chances of detection."

"But who had a chance to steal it?" asked Paul. "Some one must have sneaked it from the study. Why!" he exclaimed. "I was in there myself late that afternoon, Mr. Barrows, with that notice about the Glee Club. I remember seeing the pile of essays."

"Yes," said the principal gravely. "Mr. Barrows recalled finding your note and also one from the matron of Clarke House. I asked Mrs. Holmes what boy she sent with it but she could not recollect. But none of those little fellows could have known the importance of those essays nor dare have meddled with them. You saw nothing suspicious, Paul?"

Paul did not answer; his gaze was bent on the floor. Upon his dazed comprehension was breaking the full significance of the problem.

He finally looked up to meet Dr. Hilton's eyes.

"I again repeat my perfect confidence in you, Paul," said the principal gently. "But it is most unfortunate that Patterson's should be the missing essay. When the affair becomes public, as I fear it must, there will of course be a good deal of feeling. When you were in the study, did you notice any one there?"

"No one," replied Paul. "I laid my note on Mr. Barrows' desk and went directly out."

"That's all then," said Dr. Hilton. "Don't speak of this to any one. I shall defer the announcement about the prize until I have decided what to do. And don't worry, Paul," he added kindly.

Paul took his dismissal and went out into the clear winter day, his brain in a whirl. It was little to him that the long-coveted prize was his. Step by step he went over the conversation, appreciating as he had not done at the time, just what conclusions might be drawn.

His preoccupation at luncheon passed with scant notice, for all were busy and time was short. He could not hope, however, to escape Alex's sharp eyes when both came in to dress for dinner.

"What's the matter, Paul? Is it the kid? I don't believe he's more than uncomfortably sick."

Paul started. Not one thought had he given his little brother since that brief visit to Dr. Cary's office. And if that was only this morning, it seemed years and years ago!

"Oh, Archer!" he finally murmured. "I forgot him. Poor little chap, he'll think me a hard-hearted villain. I'll run over before dinner and take him a book."

"Well, if it isn't Gabriel, what is the matter?" demanded Alex. "Are you in love? What's the charmer's name? You look as worried as a hedgehog. You've used toothpaste to wash your hands with and if you really think a paper-cutter is a satisfactory substitute for a comb, you're much mistaken. Now, what's up?"

"I can't tell you," replied Paul, so soberly that his room-mate in turn stopped joking and grew serious. "It's bad, about as bad as it can be and I can't see my way out of it."

"Is it Patterson?"

"I can't tell you," repeated Paul. "As soon as I can, I will. But, Alex, do you think it

would be possible for a fellow,—say me,—to do a thing that was both mean and dishonest and not know it?”

“Not you, St. Paul,” said Alex wisely. “Some chaps,—yes.”

“I mean absent-mindedly, really not know.”

Alex again shook his head. “You did nothing of the sort,” he repeated.

“I hope I didn’t!” sighed Paul. “But I feel so at sea, I really wonder if I could have. Well, I must scribble a note for Archer.”

Just before the bell rang for dinner, Paul dashed off in the direction of the infirmary. To Alex’s surprise and to his secret dismay, his chum’s seat remained vacant during the entire meal.

CHAPTER XIX

WHAT PAUL THOUGHT

DR. HILTON was usually in his office for an hour during the evening, sometimes seeing people by appointment, more often giving his attention to students who came from their own initiative. To-night, Paul was among those who sought an interview. When he again entered the study, the principal gazed inquiringly at him, for his visitor looked pale and excited.

“Dr. Hilton,” he began. “I came about that affair of the Chase prize and the missing essay. I’ve been thinking about it all the afternoon and I see now just what Patterson and his friends will think. I didn’t take it all in at first. There’s only one thing I can do and I want to do it. It’s true that Patterson’s essay would probably have been my closest rival. Well, I won’t take the prize. I withdraw my own essay from the contest.”

Dr. Hilton was silent for so long that Paul had time to recover from his excitement, to feel

a curious sense of relief and to wonder what the principal was thinking.

“Paul, I told you not to worry,” said Dr. Hilton at length. “Withdrawing your essay doesn’t explain the mysterious disappearance, but it will go far toward silencing those who might think and speak unkindly. Neither does it make things right for Patterson. If he has not destroyed the rough draft of his essay, he might be given the opportunity to reconstruct it. Or we might omit the prize entirely this year. But that would not be fair to you.”

“I don’t care anything about the prize,” said Paul. “It is nothing, won this way. I’d rather withdraw my essay.”

“You have a right to do that,” replied the principal after another pause. “Of course, no one who knows you well will think you are connected with the affair, but though you withdraw your essay, you must be prepared to have even that attributed to false motives.”

“I suppose so,” muttered Paul.

“You see it has been plain to the faculty as well as to the school that the rivalry between you and Patterson is not friendly. I have regretted that fact.”

Dr. Hilton spoke so kindly that Paul could not feel hurt. "In your place," he went on, "I should feel as you do about withdrawing from the contest. I will see Patterson; we shall talk the matter over at faculty meeting tomorrow and the decision will probably be announced within a day or two. I am more sorry about the whole affair than I can say."

Paul left the office with a heart somewhat lightened. He did not want the prize under such conditions but his anger and resentment were strong against the unknown person who had made the coveted honor impossible for him. Try as he might, he could think of no one who could have imagined he was doing him a service.

Suddenly Paul stopped short. An idea had struck him with a force that was almost physical.

Alex was genuinely distressed by his roommate's evident perturbation and by his absence from dinner. It was a relief to see Paul appear at eight, apparently in a calmer frame of mind.

"Hungry?" he inquired. "I constructed a

hot roast-beef sandwich for you. It's on the bookcase, and some apples and crackers too."

"I forgot about dinner. I was thinking. Thanks for the grub. It appears to be cold roast beef now."

"How did you find Gabriel?" inquired Alex, leaning back in his chair to watch Paul dispose of the huge sandwich with a speed that spoke of hunger.

"Rather rocky. Miss Schimmelhorn came to the door. Archer was feeling bum but was plucky. Said she guessed he must be a favorite, for there had been five masters and a steady procession of boys to ask for him. All sorts of fruit and truck had been presented for his benefit. But the only things he wanted were his kitten, which wouldn't stay, and to see me, which was forbidden."

"Poor little fellow!" said Alex reflectively. "Tonsilitis is no joke. Makes one feel mean all over."

"There are three other chaps in the infirmary, but of course a bad throat has to be isolated."

Paul opened his books as he spoke and silence

settled over the study. Alex stole several glances at his room-mate, but though Paul looked tired, he was certainly more composed in manner.

Two days later an impressive silence filled the chapel when Dr. Hilton after morning prayers, arose to address the school. The boys listened in amazement to a concise presentation of the facts concerning the missing essay.

"This matter does not lie between Arnold and Patterson alone," went on the principal. "It concerns every one of us. From whatever motive Patterson's essay was abstracted, the person who took it has done a grave injustice to both boys. Arnold refuses to take a prize won under such conditions. Patterson had no chance to win it.

"I appeal to your honor. I ask the boy who took that essay from Mr. Barrows' study to come to me some time to-day. He may choose his own hour but I ask him to come."

Dr. Hilton dismissed an assemblage already splitting into factions. Paul, making his way out of chapel, heard not only sympathetic words from his own friends, but remarks that showed Patterson's friends already rallying for him.

“Barrows’ study,—Arnold is in that house. Easy enough to work it.”

“But Arnold won’t take the prize,” said a quiet voice.

“Of course not; now it’s found out,” said the first speaker.

Paul would not lower his own dignity by turning to see who the two were, but his face grew white and stern. All day he constantly came upon groups discussing the matter, some that turned eagerly to him with words of appreciation and sympathy; others that dissolved at his approach, leaving half-ended sentences for him to wonder about.

“Do you think anybody will go to the Doctor?” he asked of Alex during study hour that evening.

Alex raised his grave eyes from his geometry. “I doubt it,” he said after a pause. “The fellow who was low enough to take that essay won’t have honor enough to own up.”

“Particularly if the essay happens to be his own,” said Paul meaningly.

Alex’s book fell unheeded from the table. “You don’t think that?” he exclaimed.

“I do.”

Alex whistled. "If Patterson did that and deliberately thought out just what it would mean to you—why, Paul, it's diabolic!"

"It's precisely what I do think," returned his room-mate grimly. "What other solution is there? It was done as no favor to me. Whoever took that essay had it in for me personally and did the thing that would injure me most. Oh, whoever thought out that scheme had brains and used them!"

Alex was silent for some time and when he did speak it was very seriously.

"I wish you would put that idea out of your head. I've never liked Patterson, but I don't believe he's that kind. To deliberately plan such an elaborate scheme of injury would mean, why, it would mean real moral depravity, Paul."

"It's the only theory that fits everything all round," Paul replied bitterly. "If any one does own up to the Doctor, I'll admit I'm mistaken. But no one will. And that will settle it in my opinion."

Alex's pencil was thoughtfully tracing a design on the polished table. "You'll do yourself a still further injustice if you stick to that

theory," he remarked after a lapse of some moments during which a Latin dictionary apparently absorbed Paul's attention.

"Why?" demanded his friend stiffly.

"Come down off your perch!" went on Alex. "Because it hurts any chap to cherish a grudge. And with no definite evidence to go on, you ought not to think that. Even the law balks at circumstantial evidence. You don't know,—you only suspect. And it will be a worse injury than any one has done you yet, to let that suspicion stick in your mind."

"It's my own mind," said Paul hotly, "and it's a pretty solid suspicion. But as I said, I'll admit I'm wrong if the Doctor gets it out of any fellow. If he doesn't, I'll think what I please. Now, let's call this discussion off."

CHAPTER XX

GABRIEL, INVALID

As Dr. Hilton feared and the boys had prophesied, no one came to the office nor made any acknowledgment about the missing essay. This was a disappointment to the principal, who naturally hoped that the high standard of honor prevailing in the school would force the culprit to confess. Nothing happened, and a second and even more serious appeal remained unanswered.

Patterson had scornfully refused to consider reconstructing his essay; Paul stood firm in his determination not to take a prize won under such conditions, so there was nothing to do but award it to the boy whose name stood first on the list of honorable mention. This happened to be Harry Hotchkiss.

When the announcement was made in chapel, there was a curious silence. Under ordinary circumstances the winner would have been enthusiastically applauded, but the whole affair

had been so unusual that the school seemed at a loss how to conduct itself. Not until Paul and Alex, with Phil and others of Harry's personal friends started the applause, did the rest seem to realize what was due to the winner.

Harry looked and felt extremely uncomfortable as he came to the front of the chapel. Dr. Hilton tried his best to make the bestowal of the silver medal and a handsomely bound set of Parkman seem the usual ceremony, but even Dr. Hilton was feeling the strained situation. Harry could scarcely have appeared more distressed had he been undergoing a sentence of expulsion.

He came to Study 18 that evening to express his disgust with the whole business and his unwillingness to take a prize really won by Paul. His awkward protestations were an added thorn to Paul's already over-sensitive condition. Though the three tried earnestly to make Harry feel that they were glad for him, the effort was obvious and by common consent the subject was dropped.

The affair soon faded into oblivion as far as the rest were concerned. In the crowded and busy life of a school it is an unusual event

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indeed that is more than a nine-days' wonder. Before long no one, except those most intimately concerned, seemed to remember the matter, and they did not discuss it. Only to Alex, had Paul spoken of his own theory. He intrenched himself in an armor of reserve which successfully repelled would-be sympathizers. True, he was obliged to lower this defense for Phil, for Mr. Barrows, and for one or two others, but for the school in general it served its purpose and carried him through those hard days with unimpaired dignity.

Archer's attack of tonsilitis proved severe and two weeks passed before Dr. Cary pronounced him in condition to receive a visitor.

Paul came during the hour before dinner. He was prepared to find his brother looking ill, but was really shocked to see a little person who seemed to have no color except in eyes and hair, and who looked pathetically thin and small in a blue dressing-gown against his pillows.

"Why, you poor forlorn little scrap!" exclaimed Paul. "What have they been doing to you?"

Archer hugged him with all his strength. "Oh, it is nice to see you, Paul!" he sighed.

“Miss Ruth says I may sit up a few minutes and I thought we could both sit in the big chair by the fire.”

A far less affectionate brother than Paul would have yielded to this appeal. Presently they were established in the designated chair, Archer perfectly radiant and talking as though he had a year to make up for.

“Mother sprained her ankle,” he began. “Did you know? That’s why she didn’t come to take care of me. It would have been so beautiful to have her. But she writes every day, and Tony writes sometimes and Uncle Court, too. And Patsy stays with me now. He is quite used to living here. Did you know Patsy was a very valuable cat?”

“Well, I’ve always suspected he wasn’t an ordinary beast,” replied Paul gravely.

“No, he isn’t,” agreed Archer. “He is a high-bred kitten. See how beautiful his coat has grown! And he is fatter, too. When anybody picks him up he doesn’t slide around so in his skin. But I do wish he’d stop burning off his whiskers on the radiator. Miss Ruth brushes and combs him every morning and he sits on her lap and likes it. His hair is parted

clear down to his tail. Miss Ruth combed my hair that way once but it wasn't as becoming to me as it is to Patsy. What have you been doing all this long time, Paul?"

"Oh, lots of things! Studying and skiing and gym and debates. I'm pretty busy because I mean to take my preliminaries this next term."

"What's that?" asked Archer, cuddling closer.

"Examinations, for college, you know. I can take some this year, and if I pass, then I don't have so many next year."

"Do I have to take them?"

"Well, not for some years," laughed Paul. "You needn't worry about them just yet. How have you been getting on?"

"I haven't done very much," replied Archer. "I feel more rested when I stay in bed. But Miss Ruth reads to me and a great many letters come. I don't mind about anything now my throat has stopped aching. Did you go to the tea that Lansing gave for his cousin?"

"Yes," said Paul. "How did you know about it?"

"Lansing wrote me a letter. He said he

told his mother he wanted to give this tea and asked her to send him some little cakes. She sent eighty-nine hermits and sixty-seven macaroons. They looked very nice. Three of each came to me, but I couldn't eat them because they were too scratchy for my sore throat. So we gave them to Farquhar. He's laid up across the corridor with a broken leg which doesn't prevent his eating anything he wants. But do you know, Uncle Court wrote that he was coming to Boston some time this month and was going to bring Tony with him. They'll come out here to see us. I've been thinking that I'll give a tea for Tony. Do you think she would like it?"

Paul gave an amused chuckle. Archer was as good as sunshine for dispersing the clouds of the past fortnight. "As Tony herself would say, she'd simply adore it!"

"There's one great difficulty," Archer went on, "and that's about the tea. I'm so afraid Mrs. Holmes won't let me have any."

"That would be a blight," said Paul. "See here! We'll give a combination affair in my study. I can have all the tea we want and you shall ask three of your friends to meet Tony

and I'll ask three of mine. How will that do?"

"Great!" said Archer. "I thought you'd fix it. And can we have cake and things?"

"Sure! And chocolates for Tony and perhaps maple sugar; she loves it. I'll invite Barrows, too. It always pleases him to have the boys ask him when they entertain mothers or relatives, and he can talk with Uncle Court."

Archer gave a sigh of satisfaction. "You'll invite Lansing, won't you? Did you know how he and Hotchkiss came and made snow animals under my window? We heard somebody laughing and joking outside and Miss Ruth looked out, but only saw two big boys doing something in the snow. Later, they called up through a megaphone for me to look out in the morning. I do like megaphones, Paul. After the Faulkner game, I found one in the chapel and I asked Mr. Carter if I might give out the hymns through it but he wouldn't let me. Well, in the morning, Miss Ruth carried me over to the window, and there was a snow dog, and an elephant with a funny trunk and a very tough-looking cat labeled Patsy. Their legs got soft pretty soon and they sort of sat down,

but I liked them very much. And were you with the choir when they came and sang after rehearsal?"

"A week ago? No, I cut practice that night."

"I didn't hear your voice, but I loved their music. Mr. Carter was with them. Mrs. Carter has sent me jelly twice, and Mrs. Hilton jelly and flowers and Mr. Pomeroy sent a book and said he missed me. But it's best of anything to see you, Paul."

Miss Schimmelhorn looked in and glanced at the clock. Her patient ought not to talk much more, ought to be back in bed. But something she saw in Paul's face made her delay her entrance for another five minutes. Some rumor of the trouble the older Arnold had been through had reached her. It looked as though this interview was resting him as well as Archer.

"And did you ever read that book there?" Archer asked when he was finally put back in the narrow bed. "Skinny lent it to me. He likes it but Miss Ruth said she didn't think I would."

Paul glanced at the title. "I once read three

chapters of it," he replied gravely. "Then I looked under my bed before I got in!"

"I guess we won't read it," laughed Archer. "This one here is the best of all. Patterson sent it. He said it was Nelly's favoritest book of fairy tales and he got it in Boston on purpose for me. I like it so much that I don't want to read it for fear of finishing it. I haven't had a chance to thank him yet, because when I write only to Mother, the pencil gets so heavy. If you see him, will you tell him that Miss Ruth and I both think it is dandy?"

A shadow crossed Paul's face. For a moment he did not speak. "I must go now, Archer," he said, gently freeing himself from the clinging hands. "I'm not very likely to see Patterson to speak with. You'd better get Miss Ruth to help you write a note of thanks. You can tell her what to say and I'm sure she'll write it."

CHAPTER XXI

PRIVATE DETECTIVE LANSING

"I wish," said Phil Lansing one evening a week later, "that I were Sherlock Holmes and Scotland Yard and the Paris prefect of police rolled into one!"

Hotchkiss and Lawrence greeted this modest ambition with a jeer. "So you could unravel this affair of the Chase essay, I suppose," said Pops.

"Sure! You would behold it evolve before my eagle eye as easily as I'm going to broil this fish," replied Phil from the hearth rug. Being Wednesday night, an impromptu feast was in process of preparation. Harry, constructing coffee on a spirit lamp, permitted it to boil over at this point.

"Pops, you lazy lobster, lend a hand," he ordered. "Golly, what a mess!"

"What's the dif.?" said Pops lazily. "Phil likes spots on his rug. Makes 'em himself sometimes."

"I'll make a few on Harry when I get this fish fried," threatened Phil. "Why don't Alex and Paul come? I thought our winning from Faulkner at hockey last Saturday would cheer Paul up, but it hasn't. And it was a good licking, too,—four to one."

"Pops sure put in fine work," said Harry approvingly. "You were a dandy guard and no mistake. Thirty-eight stops is some record."

"Yet it was Pops who let them score," teased Phil, turning over his broiler. "When he got put out of the game for four minutes."

"It was an outrage!" said Pops heatedly. "They said I slashed. I didn't, and even if I had, it wasn't fair to penalize me for so long."

Lansing chuckled. "Pops, my love, you were penalized exactly one minute for possible slashing; you got the rest for talking back to the referee."

Pops grinned. "Well, I had that satisfaction anyway."

"Was it unmixed satisfaction?" went on Lansing slyly. "Didn't Barry give you a call-down, too?"

Pops shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, he did

get off some bromide about getting too excited to remember that I was a gentleman. But I could have slain that referee! He's a man with a beastly, nasty, disagreeable temper. He put me out just to save his own face."

Lansing laughed again. "Pops, my son, you handed him considerable cheek. But come, get busy. Open that can of peas and set it to warm."

"Let's put it in unopened," suggested Preston, turning it over in his fingers. "It'll warm much sooner."

"Go ahead," agreed Phil. "Try it and watch it blow up. Oh, punch a hole in it and then go and rout out Study 18."

Pops complied. "Paul's coming in a minute," he reported. "Alex broke his goggles and has gone to bed with a sick headache."

"What a beastly shame!" said Phil. "He can't come at all?"

"Nope," said Pops. "Paul took the glasses to the optician in the village and they are to be sent up this evening. But he says Alex really is sick and wants to be let alone. Paul doesn't act like himself either."

"Reason enough," retorted Phil, transfer-

ring his nicely broiled fish to a large sheet of brown paper spread flat on the long-suffering rug. "Lemon! Salt! A knife! What ho! Minions, attend on me game ankle. But just watch Private Detective Lansing getting busy on his job."

Paul's appearance cut short any further dissertation on Phil's part. The fish being served, the cook arose from the hearth. Promoted from crutches to a cane, he was able to hobble around with more ease.

"Barry's giving a feed in his study," Paul remarked. "Three ladies and Chapin and Dr. Cary. Told me he should be engaged this evening so it was up to me to keep an eye on things."

Hotchkiss, taking the peas from the fire, here tipped the can. Though a great hissing resulted, fortunately but few peas were spilled.

"Only another spot on the rug," he groaned. "Somebody knocked, Pops. See who it is, will you?"

Lawrence obediently opened the door. "Why, Gabriel, and is it yourself? *Delighted!* Walk in."

Archer entered, but stopped at sight of the feast. "I came to find Paul," he explained

rather shyly. "Alex was in bed and he said he was here. I didn't mean to interrupt a party."

"You're its most welcome guest!" said Phil hospitably, while Harry slapped him on the shoulder and Paul held out a welcoming hand. "Here, have some of my fish. When did you escape from the infirmary? Who were your accomplices?"

"They let me out this afternoon," replied Archer, going to his brother's side. "I've had my dinner. And I don't want any fish,—I truly don't. Mrs. Holmes said I might come to see Paul for just fifteen minutes."

"You poor kid!" said Phil. "You look like a—a rain-washed bone, as the poet says. And you've grown two inches. Don't you honestly want some fish? Well, we're jolly glad to see you. Couldn't you drink some coffee?"

"Don't!" protested Paul. "He mustn't have it. If you've got any sense, Phil, do use it."

Archer suddenly smiled, his white little face lighting up in just its old radiant way. "I liked my snow animals," he said, "and the things from your tea, too. Everybody was so

good to me that it was 'most worth while being sick."

"Gabriel, don't mention it," responded Lansing solemnly. "The obligation is wholly ours. Jinks! what's that?"

Both electric lights suddenly went out, leaving the study illuminated only by the dying fire.

"Power-house gone on a strike," suggested Harry. "No, for Sanderson and Brandon are lighted. Our circuit perhaps."

"Here, catch my plate, Archer," said Paul. He opened the study door to find the corridor lights extinguished. A glow from the stairway showed that the third floor had not been affected by the trouble.

"Somebody has blown out the fuse!" he ejaculated in disgust.

Occupants of second-floor rooms began to emerge, shadowy forms to romp and rough-house in the hall. "Light! Light! We want light!" they chanted. "Send forth thy light!" sang one musical lad.

Harry had touched a match to one of the candles on the mantel and handed it to Paul.

"Look here, fellows!" began Paul indig-

nantly. "This is the second time somebody has burned out a fuse within a month. It's got to stop. That type of humor doesn't appeal to the house in general."

"We want light!" responded the chorus in excellent time and tune.

"You'll get it when you make it!" retorted Paul. "I have a candle here and it's a matter of perfect indifference to me whether the rest of you sit in darkness or not. The fellow who blew out that fuse can ask Mr. Barrows for another and go down cellar and put it in. And until he does it, you can jolly well stay in the dark."

Back in the study Phil giggled. "Take notes, Gabriel," he chuckled. "Then, when you're House-president of Foster, you'll know how to deal with naughty boys who blow out fuses."

"How did they do it?" asked Archer wonderingly.

"Come here," said Lansing with a sudden laugh. "Listen," he whispered. "Paul would whale me if he knew I told you but I will. Take a cent, just a common copper cent and screw it in between a bulb and the socket.

That's what does the job. But in the end, you always have to own up and it usually means a demerit. It's really not considered screamingly funny, Gabriel. Going to try it to-night when you get over to Clarke?"

"To-night would be the best time if I were ever going to," replied Archer, sliding an arm around Lansing's neck. "They were rather glad to have me back from the infirmary and if I burned out a fuse, Pummy would only send me to bed, and I've got to go anyway."

"Take my advice and don't," said Phil, hugging him in return. "You know how it's done and you know what'll happen, so where's the fun? Jinks! Here comes Barrows. I'll bet his lights went out, too."

In truth the mischief-maker had inadvertently put out the master's lights. Having guests, Mr. Barrows was naturally annoyed and came upstairs in haste. He stopped on hearing Paul already expostulating with the offenders.

The crowd was evidently somewhat taken aback by their House-president's ultimatum. Murmurs of disapproval began to arise. The

prospect of an evening spent in darkness didn't look much fun.

"Will putting in a fuse end the matter?" inquired a disguised voice from the shadows.

"So far as the House is concerned," replied Paul. "Mr. Barrows will probably give whoever did it a demerit."

"Mr. Barrows is here," said that gentleman calmly. "I have a lamp in my study and as Arnold says, it is a matter of indifference to me whether the rest of you have any illumination or not. If the fellow who burned out that fuse doesn't put one in within the next five minutes, I'd advise the rest of you to compel him to do so."

Harry and Preston had strolled to the door to look on at the controversy, but Lansing's ankle had kept him to the couch. Seeing the others all intent on what was taking place outside, he suddenly turned to Archer.

"Listen to me, Gabriel," he said softly, catching him by the chin. "Patterson is always decent to you. Tell me now,—I've a reason for asking,—has Patterson ever said anything to you about Paul?"

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Archer considered him. There was very little light in the room. He could not make out the expression of Lansing's face, but the merry voice was unusually serious.

"About Paul?" he repeated. "I don't think we ever talk of him."

"Patterson has never said anything to make you think he didn't like him?"

"Not like Paul?" Archer gravely shook his head. "Doesn't he?" he inquired wonderingly.

Lansing released the chin he held. "Check number one, Private Detective L.," he remarked. "'The plot is deeper than I thought!' Well, has Patterson ever asked you to do any errands for him? To a master's study, for instance?"

"Never," said Archer with evident sincerity. "Why?"

"I have a curious habit of asking questions with my tongue, Gabriel. Are they going to pitch you right back into all your classes?"

"No," said Archer, smiling. "I'm to be excused from afternoon school till Dr. Cary says not. I ought to go back now. Only I do want to see if the light comes on."

The other three returned to the dim study. "Go easy on the fish," warned Phil. "You may get bones in your throat. Better eat peas till somebody's conscience gets busy. Who did it, Paul?"

"I don't know and I don't want to know, either. These kids with a stunted sense of the funny make me tired."

"Then you'll sleep all the better to-night," said Phil sweetly. "There she comes!"

The lights flashed on as suddenly as they went off. Paul's annoyed expression disappeared.

"I'm afraid I must go," said Archer reluctantly. "I'd like so much to stay. It's nicer here and they will make me go to bed."

"Wish you could stay," said Paul, helping him into his coat. "Cheer up, old fellow. You'll soon be feeling more frisky."

As he spoke, Paul carefully buttoned the red Mackinaw and turned the collar up around Archer's ears. "Have you got on your rubbers?" he demanded. "Don't you dare stir one step without them until June!"

"Tell him to practice what he preaches, Gabriel," advised Preston.

“Good-night, old chap! Come again!” said the others.

Archer departed, bestowing upon them a rather weary little smile, for the exciting afternoon had left him fatigued.

“He doesn’t look fit to be out,” growled Paul.

“Nice kid,” observed Pops. “If anybody had told me last fall that I could really be as fond of any of the little chaps as I’ve grown of Gabriel, I wouldn’t have believed it.”

“Gabriel,” said Phil solemnly, “is a little bit of all right. Odd, isn’t it, considering whose brother he is! But I wonder—”

Phil fell into a brown study, lasting until Pops and Harry withdrew to the bathroom to wash the dishes. The cook being unanimously excused, Paul was detailed to entertain him.

“Old cow,” said Lansing, when they were alone. “I’ve had an idea about that essay. Let me talk just a minute,” he added, for at the very mention, Paul had flinched. “Has it entered your head that Patterson himself might have taken or caused it to be taken away?”

“It’s the one thing I do think,” said Paul bitterly.

Lansing whistled. "Then I'm not so bright as I thought," he remarked.

"It's not much use to talk," said Paul, poking the fire. "I mentioned that theory to Alex and he landed on me like a thousand of brick. I imagine it never occurred to either the Doctor or Barrows. What's the use? There's no way of proving anything. When I stop being hot about it long enough to do so, I know he's not worth caring about. The thing that really gets me,—the thing I stick at swallowing, is his being so friendly toward Archer."

"I know it," said Phil, eyes on the fire.

"And yet," Paul went on, "when I once pitched into the kid for talking with Patterson, Archer made me feel like thirty cents. For some reason, Patterson has taken a fancy to him. I wouldn't condescend to ask again what they were talking about, but that time it had nothing to do with school. And low-down as I believe Patterson to be—I believe he helped lose both those games last fall, and I believe he knows about this essay business—I still think he does show Archer a different side. There is something in the kid, you know, that appeals to what's decent in the fellows."

"Yes, I know," Phil agreed. "Then you think he really likes Gabriel in the same way the rest of us do?"

"Looks that way. The kid is so fond of me and he's so clever that I can't think he'd really be taken in by a fellow who tried to set him against me. Apparently, Patterson never has tried it. No, strange as it may seem, I believe he likes Archer just for himself."

"Has Patterson ever spoken to you about it, this essay business, I mean?"

"The last words Patterson and I exchanged were four months ago when I ordered him out of the Faulkner game."

A silence followed Paul's curt reply. "It's a pity," said Phil at last, "that you can't go to Patterson and have it out between you. Lick him if necessary, but clear things up."

"I've no patience for an argument and no desire to dirty my hands licking him. It's no use, Phil. I appreciate your wanting to help me but there's nothing to be done."

"But I do want to ask you another question. You said you noticed the pile of essays when you went into Barry's study. Tell me, where on the desk were they?"

Paul considered. "At the left hand, I think. Just where he would naturally place them to be out of the way."

Phil gave a satisfied nod. "Near the window. Do you know a kid over in Brandon named Adams?"

"Know who he is. He is rather thick with Patterson."

"Exactly. Now listen to your Uncle Phil. That Wednesday afternoon I was doing up some Christmas presents. I remember the date because they had a long way to go and Mother wrote me not to forget to start them early. Well, I was working here at my desk when Adams came shinning down the fire escape. It was after dusk for I had my light on and I didn't see him until he was outside the window. He'd been visiting Shoestrings. They are chummy, you know. It was a warm evening, really hot for the time of year and my window was up. Adams leaned in over the sill and spoke to me. Then he reached in and took a book I was about to wrap. He looked at it and we talked a minute or two and then he went on down the escape."

"Well, what has that to do with it?"

"My study," said Phil impressively, "is directly over Barrows'. If Adams could reach in and take a book from my desk, what's to prevent his reaching in as he passed Barrows' window and taking an essay?"

There was a silence. "Nothing," said Paul, "provided the window was open."

"He could easily open it if it wasn't locked and they never are," went on Lansing. "But while in some respects this is a perfectly good theory, there are two points in which it doesn't hold water."

"One," said Paul, "is the fact that if Adams had it on his mind to do a dirty job for Patterson, he wouldn't have been likely to stop and talk. He'd have shinned past the window without attracting your attention."

"Exactly," agreed Phil. "And the other stumps me even more. The first time Doc Hilton spoke of the affair in chapel, of course it was all news to me. But when he began on it for the second time, I'd done some thinking and I glued my eagle eye on Adams. He never turned a hair and Doc said some things that would have made a dog squirm if he'd done it. So I was dished. You know, I can't see how a

fellow with a single spark of manliness in him could have listened to Doc that last time and not have owned up. Why, I fell to considering my own sins on the spot!"

Paul smiled. "Doc can make a fellow do some thinking. No, if Patterson took the essay, I think he took it himself."

Lansing was silent for a moment. "That was my second theory," he explained, "and that's gone up. Now, I don't know what to think. I did have a wild idea that perhaps Patterson had been using Gabriel as a cat's paw, but I asked the kid two questions to-night while you were out settling the row, and I saw at once that Gabriel was as unconscious of anything wrong as an infant in arms. But that is a queer friendship."

"Yes," sighed Paul. "I don't like it. Still, the kid convinced me that it was all on the square. And the kid isn't good at lying."

"Then the only thing left is Patterson's taking it himself. And if he didn't, something must have happened without any one's being to blame. A gust of wind may have swept it away."

"Quite likely," agreed Paul. "Any blizzard

strong enough to take one paper would, of course, have left the rest of the pile unmoved."

"And forty years from now, they will house-clean Barrows' study and find that essay. Then the Doctor will send for you both. You'll be a—a consulting engineer like your uncle. Patterson,—what do you think he'll be then?"

"Either a con man or a bank president," replied Paul coolly. "You lunatic! But that reminds me of something Barry told me the other day. You know the Pierce medals that are given every year to the first three in the graduating class? Only a fellow has to win one by character as well as scholarship. Well, once, about thirty years ago,—yes, it must have been as long as that,—there were two fellows here who would have had medals. But the very week of graduation, just before commencement, they were caught playing cards, poker, I think. That was an awful crime in those days and they wouldn't give the poor ducks their medals. So they went away in disgrace. But the medals were marked with their names so they couldn't be used for any one else.

“Well, when old Fairfax died, and Doc Hilton became principal, ten years ago, he was looking through the office safe and found the two medals in their boxes. He read the names and the date and didn’t know why they were there. So he inquired and found out what had happened. Then he went to work and looked up the record of those two boys. One is a missionary bishop, the kind that does a whopping amount of good, you know, one of the alumni St. Stephen’s is proudest of. And the other was a United States senator!”

“Cracky!” exclaimed Lansing.

“The next time the trustees of the school had a meeting, Doc Hilton took those medals and told them all about it. There was only one man left on the board who remembered the affair. They passed a unanimous vote to give those medals to their rightful owners. So Doc sent them on and wrote to each. The bishop was tickled to pieces. Said he’d forgotten all about it, but was as pleased as Punch to have it. And the senator gave the school the money to build Brandon Hall.”

“That just goes to prove what I was saying!” went on Lansing triumphantly. “When

they do clean up Foster, after fifty years or so, this essay business will all come to light and you'll have justice in your old age. Let's see. After half a century you'll be sixty-seven. Paul, I'm sorry you'll have to wait that long!"

"If the bishop had forgotten his medal, I reckon I'll forget this before then!" laughed Paul. "But, look here, Phil, don't try any more to ferret things out. It's a sort of comfort to know somebody else thinks what I do, but the matter will have to end there. If Patterson could listen to what Doc said in chapel and not care, nothing you could do would have any effect. Honest, I would rather you let things alone."

A clash of crockery in the hall indicated that Harry and Pops had finished their task. "All right," said Phil hastily. "I'll call off my dogs of war. But just remember when my ankle gets well, I'll wipe up the earth with Patterson any time you say."

CHAPTER XXII

ON THE RIVER

ON the following Saturday several of the boys planned to take the one-fifteen train for Boston. They would have time to attend the *matinée* and take a look around the shops before returning to Riverview.

Paul, Harry, Alex, and Preston agreed to meet at the station. Three of them were prompt but when the train pulled in, Paul had not appeared. Greatly disgusted, the others went without him, wondering what had delayed him.

Nothing more important than a broken shoelace, but it was enough. Paul was a quarter of a mile from the station when he heard the train whistle and knew he could not make it. Still, he sprinted for all he was worth, only to see the signal flags on the rear disappearing around a curve.

The next train did not leave until after three o'clock and a trip into town at that hour was

merely an aggravation. The disappointment was keen, for he had anticipated the fun of going with his friends and the change from quiet Riverview to busy Boston. One or two errands he had really counted upon doing. Well, there was no help for it. How should he spend the afternoon?

Paul felt thoroughly annoyed with himself as he walked moodily uptown. His most intimate chums were on that train, save Phil, who was incapacitated. He could put in the afternoon on the ice, and now he thought of it, the idea of a long, lonely skating trip rather appealed to him. On reaching the main street of the village he turned into a grocer's to buy some sweet chocolate.

Two other boys were there, one our friend Shoestrings, who gave Paul a grin of greeting. The other paid no attention to his entrance but went on with his purchases. Paul watched him idly. What did Patterson want with barley? Quaker oats, as well? A piece of suet? What in creation was he going to cook?

Had it been any other lad in school, Paul would probably have put a joking question or two, but nothing could induce him to address

Patterson, who paid for his purchases, had them tied in a compact package and left the store without apparently even seeing Paul.

Having obtained his chocolate, Paul returned to school, got into skating garb, took his heavy gloves and went down the corridor to Lansing's room. Even now, if Phil had any other thought for the afternoon, he would change his plans. But the study was vacant. Phil might be in any room in any of the scattered buildings. To look for him was only a waste of time. Paul made no effort to find him and started for the river.

The day was very cold, but clear, sunny and still. The week had afforded the best skating of the season, and the ice was covered with boys. Four separate hockey games were going on, with numerous spectators for each. Paul sat down on the edge of the boat-house platform to take off his ordinary shoes and put on the heavy high boots to which his skates were firmly screwed. He was immediately surrounded by hockey players begging him to join them. Paul shook his head. He really wanted to get away from everybody for a little.

Toward the other bank of the river a num-

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ber of lads were busy over a pile of fuel and old barrels which would form the basis of a bonfire that evening. It was a custom at St. Stephen's on a night during the winter term when skating was good, for the school to have an "all out." This meant permission to stay on the river till ten or eleven, to skate, play games and sing around a bonfire. Some of the janitors were bringing old rubbish to add to the pile collected by the boys and from the look of things the fire bade fair to be one of the largest ever lighted at school.

As Paul was lacing his second boot a little figure skated up. "What are you doing here, Archer?" he inquired. "You're only just out of the infirmary, you know. You ought to be careful."

"I wanted to use my new skates," said Archer rather soberly. "But I haven't skated much. Patsy does behave so badly. He *would* come with me and he *will* chase the puck. It wouldn't matter so much if he'd stick to us, because we are patient with him, but he goes and butts into all the games. The big fellows said I must take him away or they wouldn't be responsible if he got his brains knocked out.

And then they said he didn't have any brains, anyhow."

Archer looked at the maligned kitten, clasped in his arms. Two round eyes were still following the movements of that fascinating disk; a beautiful plumed tail twitched slowly from side to side.

"Patsy ate a rubber band this morning," he remarked thoughtfully. "It was quite a thick, fat one. Perhaps that's what makes him act so."

Paul laughed outright. "No doubt. That explains his elastic spirits. But he sure will have his head stove in if you let him loose. Better take him up to the house. And I'd stay there if I were you. It's cold and if you can't skate fast, you'll get chilled. Take a rest this afternoon and then you'll be fresh for the bonfire this evening."

"I can't come," said Archer dejectedly.

"Why, they always let the kids come when the Upper school has its bonfire," said Paul kindly. "Or is it because of your throat?"

Archer shook his head. "Neither Boy Blue nor I may come," he said soberly. "Patsy, do keep still. You can't have that puck!"

"What have you been doing?" asked Paul.

Archer looked at him. From his brother's tone it seemed probable that he would sympathize rather than condemn and Archer was feeling very blue.

"Well," he said, "we experimented with the electric lights."

"Oh, I see!" said Paul. "And so you don't attend the bonfire?"

"No," Archer acknowledged. "Pummy did say that he didn't believe I could have gone, anyway. Paul, when they blew out the fuse that night at Foster, you didn't go around and *ask* who did it."

"I didn't need to," replied Paul. "But you might have known that you would have to own up. But there'll be bonfires other years and really, you'll be better off not to be here."

"Are you going to skate all alone?" asked Archer as Paul rose to his feet. "I wish Uncle had given me hockey skates like yours."

"Yes, I am going up the river," answered his brother. "There isn't anybody I want to go with me just now."

Archer lingered. "Would you not like me?" he inquired very wistfully.

Paul smiled. "Yes, old fellow, I'd like your company very much but that's out of the question. It's too far and you're shaky on your pins as it is. You take Patsy home and find somebody to play with in the house. Here, have some chocolate."

Archer gazed longingly after his brother. Paul was flying up the river, rocking gracefully on his flat skates. How did he do it? It looked as though he did not even lift his feet from the ice.

For a mile or more, Paul constantly encountered friends and acquaintances, playing games on the frozen river, practicing figures and other tricks, but as he skated rapidly on, the place grew more and more lonely. The ice was unusually good. Due to a thaw and a few hours' rain preceding the freeze, it was rough in only a few spots and nowhere impassable.

For a long time Paul followed the curves of the winding river, paying very little attention to its banks. Now and then he noticed some landmark grown familiar in canoeing trips, but looking strangely changed in its winter setting. The river, too, was higher than he had expected. In one grove some low bending birches

were caught by their drooping branches and compelled to stoop until spring should set them free. Curious too, that there should be so many birds. Paul saw fox sparrows, juncos, pine-grosbeaks, and others that he did not know. He watched them flying from bush to bush along the banks of the stream and finally the odd fancy struck him that they were following him.

When he did stop he was several miles from school. Before him stretched a little pond. With surprise he saw marks of skates on its surface. He had noticed them all the way up the river and wondered at them for they were made by a solitary skater and one who was traveling very rapidly. Now they struck off around the pond.

Rather curious to know who shared his own desire for solitude, Paul started in the same direction. Whoever was responsible for the tracks was still ahead of him for there was no sign of skates going downstream. In a short distance, the ice showed that the skater had turned into a little cove.

Paul slackened his pace. His curiosity was only for the identity of the person ahead of

him, he had no intention and no desire to thrust himself upon him. He looked cautiously around the bushes at the entrance to the cove, then stopped in surprise.

The ice in the inlet was quite populated by birds of several species. Kneeling in the midst of them, apparently on the friendliest terms with them was a boy in a red and black Mackinaw that Paul instantly recognized as belonging to Patterson. It was the only one of its kind in school and something peculiar in its pattern and weave had caused Phil Lansing to compare it to a caterpillar. Paul had therefore noticed it particularly.

For a moment he stood amazed. Patterson had opened the package brought from the grocery and scattered grain around the ice. Some of the birds were actually eating from his hands and none showed the slightest fear. They acted as though they were used to his company.

After taking in the full significance of the scene before him, Paul recollected himself and with one swift stroke glided quietly beyond the inlet and continued on his way around the pond. Patterson would know from the ice that

some one had been there. He should see that the skater had apparently passed directly by.

Paul circled the pond at racing speed. What a queer combination Patterson was! He was almost the last boy in school one would have suspected of deliberately going off into the woods to feed hungry birds. And yet, in a way, it fitted in with some other things, his liking for Archer, for instance. What an odd muddle things were!

His speed-skates and the rate at which he was traveling soon brought Paul again to the river and he turned schoolward. The sun was fast reaching the western horizon. There was nothing like fresh air and exercise for sweeping the cobwebs from one's brain. After all, perhaps the afternoon had done him as much good as one spent in town.

He skated rapidly for a mile down the river and then looked back. No one was in sight and Patterson probably could not now overtake him. Still he held his high speed, but allowed himself occasional glances at the sunset.

One of these glances proved his undoing. The clouds were glorious and watching them, Paul neglected to look ahead. Had he tripped



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on a twig or a stone, he could probably have saved himself. But with eyes fixed on the sunset, Paul skated into a loop of rope frozen into the ice.

The impetus of his motion flung him headlong almost before he knew he was falling. With no chance to save himself he went down violently.

Fully a moment passed before he came to himself sufficiently to know what had happened. He was conscious of feeling stiff and bruised and then of a pain in his right hand, a pain that as he moved the fingers, shot all the way up to his shoulder.

"Wonder if I've broken my arm," he thought. Deliberately he lifted it, and despite acute pain, moved it sufficiently to make certain this was not the case. Pulling off his glove, he saw that the hand was already swelling and discolored.

"Sprained it at least," he reflected. "Well, I must get back."

He tried to rise to his feet but discovered that damage even more hampering had been done. The heel of his boot was pulled completely off. His left skate hung useless.

Paul sank down on the ice. This was a predicament. He looked grimly at his shoe. Could that heel be pounded on with sufficient firmness to permit him to skate back to school? If it could, how was he going to do it? Not with that arm with twinges of pain continually shooting up its bruised muscles and nerves. He was five miles up the river and walking that distance in his stocking feet was out of the question. Perhaps he could slide on one foot and drag the detached skate.

The first attempt convinced Paul that he must at least wait until he felt less sick and faint. He dragged himself to the bank and sat down.

Patterson tarried some time with the feathered pensioners of his bounty, carefully tied strips of suet to convenient trees that they might find food until he should come again, and just as the sun was setting, came out into the pond. As Paul anticipated, he instantly noticed the cut ice, showing that some one had passed. But the visitor had so evidently passed that he did not give it another thought as he started down the stream. The twilight

would be long and there would be a moon to throw light on his homeward path.

A mile down the river he turned a curve and swung into view of a boy sitting on the bank. He did not look up at hearing the click of skates, nor did Patterson at first recognize him. He glided up, intending to hail a probable school-mate.

Paul was not surprised, since he had known that Patterson was on the river, but the moment was awkward for both. Patterson sheered off without speaking, then noticed that Arnold was very pale and that something was wrong with one skate.

"Can I help you?" he asked at length in a constrained voice.

"No, thank you," said Paul stiffly.

Patterson skated slowly backward. Something serious was wrong and he knew it. Arnold was in trouble, but he had offered assistance and been refused. After that, it was none of his business. Still, he hesitated a second before vanishing around the curve of the river.

For another five minutes Paul sat where he was. His head was steadier now, but hand

and arm were very painful. He rose and made an effort to slide on his one secure skate and push with the other foot. For a few rods this answered fairly well, then the semi-detached skate caught and almost threw him. Sitting down on the bank, he tried to separate the skate completely from the shoe, an undertaking difficult at any time without the proper tools and impossible with his left hand alone.

Well, what was to be done? Should he take off both boots and walk? The night was steadily growing colder and his feet would be in terrible condition before he reached his destination,—if he ever got there. Was there a house where he could obtain help? None by the river, certainly, and progress over the snow covered fields to a farm would be even more difficult than on the ice.

There was just one possible solution. Could he only get that heel pounded back in place, the skate might hold if he moved very slowly and carefully.

Paul unlaced his boot. This was not difficult with his left hand but getting the heel in place was another matter. Engaged in this attempt, his attention divided between his task and the

constant pain of his right arm, he did not hear Patterson's approach.

"Whether you like it or not, Arnold, I can't go down the river and leave you here. I see you've had an accident. Let me fix that heel."

Paul looked up. Patterson, standing before him, looked straight back, then went down on one knee to examine the skate. Without a word he took the stone Paul had been futilely trying to use and pounded the heel into place.

"There!" he said. "Just put that on."

Paul pulled the boot on and flushed with annoyance at his inability to manipulate the laces. "I've strained my hand," he remarked in dignified apology.

"That rope is a real danger," said Patterson, lacing the boot quickly. "I happened to notice it when I came up or I might have come a cropper myself. There, if you skate carefully I think that should hold," he ended, rising to his feet.

"Thank you," said Paul. "I am much obliged."

Patterson stood watching as Paul took a tentative stroke or two. "That looks as

though it would go," he remarked. He skated slowly after, keeping at a little distance.

"I won't detain you," said Paul, speaking with a courtesy that deprived the words of any secondary meaning. "I shall have to crawl down the river but I'm all right now."

He had scarcely spoken when an involuntary motion of his right arm sent the color from his face.

"The heel's all right," said Patterson, "but you aren't."

With the words he skated alongside. "Your arm will feel better if you can hold it up. I'll rig a sling."

He cast a glance at Paul's coat, saw that its belt was undetachable, pulled off the one belonging to his own jacket and with the aid of a pin improvised a rest for the injured arm. It was done so cleverly and so quickly that Paul had scarcely time to protest. The instant relief to the aching arm silenced any further comment.

"Now," said Patterson quietly, "just play I'm Phil Lansing or anybody else you choose for a few minutes."

As he spoke, he took Paul's left arm and struck out down the river.

"I hate to put you to all this trouble," said Paul after a moment.

"I don't mind," replied Patterson. "You got a nasty fall."

Dead silence followed this remark. Paul instantly thought of two other occasions when he had gone headlong, on each of which Patterson had been present. He wondered what his companion was really thinking. His skate was behaving very well. To be sure, he was putting no strain on the heel, for both were skating with that rocking motion Archer had so admired, and though their speed was moderate, they were fast covering the distance to school. Paul's arm was still painful but it no longer ached with that intolerable sickening throb. And Patterson's strong shoulder on the other side was an undeniable help. He felt that courtesy required some conversation with his benefactor, but what on earth had he to say to Patterson or Patterson to him? So in silence they traversed the river.

The sun was set, but snow and the approach-

ing moon made everything perfectly visible. The boys were gone from the upper reaches of the ice, nor on reaching the boat-house were any lads left about the prepared bonfire.

"You're late for dinner, thanks to me," said Paul, as he sat down to remove his boots.

"These your shoes?" inquired Patterson. "Can you get into them?"

"I won't stop to lace them," said Paul. "I am under great obligations, Patterson, and I thank you very much. Oh, here's your belt."

"It's no more than you would have done yourself," replied Patterson in a voice wholly without the sneering tone Paul associated with his usual manner.

Paul found his way to Foster. Every one was at dinner and he gained his room unnoticed. But when Alex came up, he was distressed indeed at Paul's condition. Mr. Barrows, hearing of the accident, visited Study 18 and promptly dispatched Harry for Dr. Cary.

Later in the evening, Paul and Lansing sat together, watching the scene on the river. The leaping flames of the bonfire lighted the ice and the figures of the skaters, flitting to and fro,

playing games and doing tricks. Dr. Cary's careful treatment had made Paul's arm far more comfortable. So long as he did not move it and kept it in the sling, it was not very painful and by earnest entreaty he had escaped being sent to the infirmary.

But as the two, left all alone in Foster, watched the gliding skaters on the river, Paul told his friend the whole story of the afternoon.

"Glory!" exclaimed Lansing when the narrative was complete. "Well, of all the queer mix-ups! Of course he couldn't leave you on the river. That was only common decency."

"He needn't have come back," observed Paul judicially. "I'd refused his help."

"True. That was white of him," assented Lansing. "But those birds! That gets me. I don't know what to think."

"Neither do I," said Paul. "It makes me think of Doc's sermon last Sunday when he said that the worst man in the world still had something good in him. Patterson seems to have two completely different sides. This is evidently the one he shows to Archer."

"Oh, Gabriel!" mused Phil. "I don't won-

der. I wish Gabriel was *my* little brother. But you know you had a dandy chance to have it out with Patterson."

"I couldn't," said Paul. "I don't suppose we said forty words to each other. But it makes me wonder all the more."

CHAPTER XXIII

A TALK WITH UNCLE COURT

ALAS for Archer's plans! Tony never had her tea, for the reason that Mr. Arnold's business took him to Montreal. The visit to St. Stephen's was cut to a single day and that day a Sunday.

Paul and Archer dined with Tony and her father at the Riverview Inn and then they adjourned to Study 18. Alex considerably vanished, leaving the four to gather around the fire. Archer, extremely disappointed at the short visit, tried to coax his uncle to leave Tony behind him during the trip to Canada.

"Mrs. Holmes will let her have a bed in her sitting-room," he urged. "Or couldn't she stay at the Inn?"

Mr. Arnold shook his head. He was not unaware of the sensation his pretty daughter had created in church that morning. Admiring and deeply respectful glances greeted her ap-

pearance on the campus, chaperoned though she was. The very rumor of her presence in Paul's study had thrown a halo of reflected glory over all Foster.

"Couldn't, Archer," he said jokingly. "I need Tony to keep my buttons sewed on. Paul, when's the Easter vacation? What had you meant to do?"

"It begins the ninth of April, Uncle. I haven't made any plans. I knew, of course, we couldn't go home for just a week. The Imp got sick and I didn't know what he'd be fit for. I've been frightfully busy and there's been a lot to think about and somehow I didn't much care what happened. I suppose we can put in the time in Boston."

"Archer does look a bit seedy," said Mr. Arnold. "And you've had rather a bad time with that sprained hand. Still troubles you somewhat, doesn't it? Do you remember Sea Pines down on the North Shore where we went a few summers ago? At this time of year it wouldn't be crowded and the salt air ought to do Archer good. Suppose you write, Paul, and engage rooms for us all. I think I can arrange my business so as to get back by the tenth at

latest and Tony and I will stay until school begins again."

Paul's face brightened and Archer hugged his uncle. To have Uncle Court and Tony in a house by the sea for a whole week was almost as nice as being at home with Mother.

"I'll write immediately," said Paul. "I can't think of anything I'd like better. And Archer does need a change. He's been out of the infirmary nearly three weeks now and I think he ought to look better than he does. They take no end of care of him, too."

"I wish Mrs. Holmes wouldn't take so much care," said Archer patiently. "She's always coming after me with a glass of milk. I'm going to sing this afternoon, Tony," he went on, turning to his cousin. "I'm glad you're here. It's the first time Mr. Carter has let me. He was afraid my throat wasn't quite well again or that I would get too tired or strain my voice. But I'm to sing at vespers."

"I'll love to hear you," replied Tony, cuddling him. "I'll listen to every word."

"What are you going to Canada for?" Paul asked of his uncle.

Mr. Arnold began an explanation of his plans

which interested the older two, but failed to hold Archer's attention. Slipping from Tony's lap, he strolled about the study and finally vanished into Paul's bedroom.

Some time passed. The talk wandered from Quebec to Montreal, back to Boston, still farther away to the dear home town, back again to school.

"Why, where's Archer?" exclaimed Antoinette at last. "Where are you, ducky?"

"Well, I'm here," replied a voice from Paul's bedroom.

"Come out," said Tony gayly. "We want you."

"I think you're mistaken," was the dubious reply.

Tony sprang up and dashed to the door to stop on its threshold with an exclamation half dismayed, half amused. "Oh, Archer," she gasped, "why did you do that?"

"What has that awful child done now?" inquired Paul, following Antoinette.

There stood Archer, looking decidedly abashed. He appeared to be doing nothing whatever but the sight of his face caused a

curious sensation in both spectators, conveyed somehow an impression of extreme incompleteness. Above his beautiful blue eyes stretched an expanse of unbroken white forehead. His dark, delicately penciled eyebrows were a thing of the past.

“Oh, Archer, you might have cut your nose off! And you look so very queer! What did you do it for?” asked Antoinette, glancing from him to the razor on Paul’s bureau.

“I had no mustache and I wished to use the razor,” Archer replied after a pause.

At this calm statement of the literal truth, Mr. Arnold, who had joined the group in the doorway, gave a suppressed chuckle. Tony laughed, but Paul seized his small brother and pulled him into the study.

“You’re a disgusting kid!” he exclaimed. “You look like the child of a monkey and a Chinese idol. Your eyebrows will grow out stiff like pigs’ bristles.”

“They will not,” replied Archer sweetly. “I have cut them off before and I know.”

“What do you think will happen when you sing that anthem this afternoon and the whole

school sees the giddy sight you look? Mr. Carter will skin you. You're all kinds of an idiot!"

During this outburst Archer stood in silence, looking sidewise at his brother.

"I suppose you've taken the edge off my razor," ended Paul. "But that's a mere detail. Well, I hope you'll keep out of my sight till they grow again."

Archer cast one glance at his uncle, whose eyes had an undeniable smile, though his mouth was grave; cast a second at his cousin.

"Come here, Archer," she said. "I want to whisper to you."

"Is it permitted to smoke, Paul?" asked Mr. Arnold, turning to his older nephew, who had subsided into disgusted silence.

"Why,—yes, it's all right for you, sir. If Barry smells tobacco, he'll inquire, but he'll take my word that it was you who had the cigar. Can I get you anything, Tony?" he added, springing to his feet.

"I'm just going over to Archer's room with him for a few minutes," said his cousin, reaching for her furs. "It's quite all right for me to go, Dad. They are only little boys and the

matron will be there. I'll be back in plenty of time for vespers."

Mr. Arnold glanced at Paul's face, still flushed and annoyed. His evident irritability could scarcely all be due to Archer's prank.

"All right, Tony. I'll stay here."

Antoinette departed, hand in hand with the outcast Archer, who clung to her as though she were his sole refuge in an unkind world. Paul closed the door after them, put a fresh log on the fire, gave an impatient glance across the muddy, snow-sodden campus, and turned to his uncle, who was meditatively regarding his cigar.

"Paul," said Mr. Arnold, "what's the matter?"

His nephew started at the unexpected question. "Just my own natural depravity, I reckon, Uncle," he said rather moodily after a moment. "It is low-down to take it out on Archer, but he knows I don't mean half I say. I really can distinguish between wilful murder and shaving off one's eyebrows. After all, they are his own eyebrows. If you hadn't been here, he would have told me so, sadly, but with an exquisite politeness. I wish he wouldn't be

so everlastingly sweet-tempered. He's spunky enough with other people, but he'll take anything from me. No matter how I pitch into him, he hardly ever gets huffy."

"It is no small thing to have such unquestioning admiration," said Mr. Arnold reflectively.

"It only makes me feel the more of a failure," muttered Paul irritably.

"Why, Paul," said his uncle, looking up, "do you think that we blamed you for not getting that prize? Not for one moment. You did your best and that was all any one asked of you."

Paul colored. It was only after three false starts that he finally went on.

"I wrote home that the prize was awarded to Hotchkiss. I never told either you or Mother exactly how it happened. I tried to write, but it was all so complicated, and I couldn't seem to put it so anybody would understand just how it was."

Paul stopped. Mr. Arnold, quietly observing him, was surprised at the expression on the boy's face. Evidently the matter was serious.

"Well," he remarked lazily. "I'm here and my cigar is good for half an hour. There's a

stool, which can be brought within reach convenient for me to pull your hair at critical moments. I'll sympathize if sympathy is needed; if a call-down is required, I'll administer it. In short, I'm at your service."

"You're the best ever, Uncle Court," said Paul gratefully, pulling up the designated hassock. "I can't think what I'd do without you. Well, here goes!"

Mr. Arnold listened in silence to the story which went back to the previous year when the captain of the team was chosen, sketched the practice with its constant petty annoyances, the game with Sudbury and the clean sweep made by Faulkner. Then it touched the missing essay and the consequent events, even Paul's accident on the river, and the timely assistance rendered by Patterson. As he concluded, Paul waited anxiously for his uncle to speak.

"A queer set of circumstances," remarked Mr. Arnold at last. After further enlightenment on several points, he continued. "The affair does seem inexplicable. The person who took the essay had, as you say, the cleverness to leave yours and to remove the other. That

was a far more subtle injury than to take yours. It seems odd that any mere lad could have thought that out. You have certainly been placed through no fault of your own in a peculiar and extremely trying situation."

"Do you think," Paul asked wistfully, "that I did the wisest thing in withdrawing my own essay?"

"It was the only action possible for your father's son," said Mr. Arnold kindly. "Paul, I'm sorry. This has been a hard experience. But you are making a mistake to brood over the affair. On the evidence, I doubt if Patterson himself really took the essay. From what you tell me he must be an odd combination, but I doubt if he did that. He may know about it, though. The thing is past, so put it all behind you. Just forget it! That's my advice."

"Oh, I do try," said Paul, "but then I get to thinking and trying to fit one thing into another. Forgetting isn't so easy. I hate to have run up against Patterson so many times. I feel as though I'd banged my head into a stone wall. And yet he was awfully decent to me on the river. He needn't have come back after I'd once refused his help."

“True,” said Mr. Arnold, extinguishing the last embers of his cigar. “That’s a strong point in his favor. But one can learn a good deal from even a process of head-bumping. Life has many stone walls along its pathways. It doesn’t do to take them all so seriously. Promise me, Paul, that you will honestly try to put the whole affair out of your mind.”

“I will,” Paul agreed. “It has helped so much to tell you, Uncle. I feel better already. You always straighten things for me.”

“I hope I shall always be able to,” said Mr. Arnold affectionately. “Here’s Tony. What have you done with Archer?”

“He’s gone on to chapel,” replied his daughter, absorbed in searching the depth of her muff. “He said the bell would ring in just a few minutes. Dad, those little chaps are the dearest lambs! I’ve had the time of my life. Boy Blue can have me any day he sets! Paul, I’ve a present for you.”

Antoinette had found the object of her search and merrily laid it in her cousin’s hand, a green glass object resembling a large marble.

“What is it?” asked Paul, turning it over on his palm.

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Antoinette fairly danced with joy. "It belongs to your *bête noire*—to Archer's cat! That's one of its eyes."

"Tony, you don't mean to say you broke it!" exclaimed Paul, bursting into a hearty laugh.

Tony nodded. "Swatted it in the ear with a poker," she explained with a side glance at her father. "Tipped it over on the andirons to complete the job. Oh, accidentally, of course! When I fell all over myself apologizing, Aunt Elinor looked so queer. She politely said it didn't matter and then she caught my eye and we both giggled. But it's gone, Paul, it's gone! No more will it sit by the fire and grin."

At sound of the chapel bell, Antoinette stopped talking and dashed into Paul's bedroom to inspect hat and hair. Paul turned to Mr. Arnold.

"Uncle, would you object if Lansing spent his vacation where we do? He can't get home, either. Tony'd like him, and Archer adores him. He stuck to me like such a Trojan all through this mix-up, and he's had a hard time himself because he broke a ligament in his ankle playing the Cheshire Cat."



“WHAT IS IT?” ASKED PAUL.—Page 305.

Mr. Arnold whistled softly. “ ‘My daughter, oh, my daughter!’ ” he soliloquized under his breath. Then he looked straight at his nephew.

“Paul, I shall probably have to spend a part of every day in Boston. You know I trust you to give Tony a brother’s protection. Is Lansing a fellow that you’d honestly want her to know as intimately as she will of necessity know him at the end of the vacation?”

Paul’s eyes met his squarely. “He is, Uncle. I thought about Tony before I spoke.”

“Very good!” said Mr. Arnold cheerfully. “If Lansing chooses to spend his Easter holidays at Sea Pines, we’ll give him a cordial invitation to sit at our table and join our revels.”

Paul escorted his uncle and cousin to seats reserved for visitors and the faculty ladies. When he entered the vestry, he had only time to slip into his surplice and take his place toward the rear of the line already formed. He found the familiar service peculiarly beautiful tonight. Already things seemed so different since he had talked with Uncle Court. After all, the only detail that ever mattered in any situation was one’s own attitude toward it.

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At the appointed moment Archer arose for his anthem. Mr. Arnold, looking across the chancel, suddenly narrowed his gaze. His small nephew appeared more angelic than ever, but it was not Archer's appealing attitude nor his unusual voice that struck his uncle most forcibly.

Mr. Arnold's gaze surveyed the other members of the choir. Paul alone was staring at his brother, and Paul's face wore an expression of blank incredulity.

Mr. Arnold looked at his daughter. Antoinette, sitting beside him in her golden-brown corduroy suit and brown furs, showed only demure, down-dropped eyelashes as she listened in devout attention to Archer's music. She was quite aware of her father's scrutiny, though she had no intention whatever of looking up. Dad had a fashion of seeing considerable in his quiet way, and just now, Tony thought he had seen enough. When she felt his quizzical inspection withdrawn, she stole a satisfied glance across the church. After all, it took but a slight knowledge of the art of "making-up" to produce a pair of eyebrows that would pass even a close inspection!

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCERNING OATMEAL

THE week by the sea turned out to Mr. Arnold's entire satisfaction. He liked Phil Lansing at first sight, and after one evening spent in his company left the next morning for a day in town, convinced that even Tony's careful mother could not object to her knowing Paul's friend.

Antoinette liked him, too; he had a way of saying such funny things in a quiet manner. He was nice to Archer and evidently very fond of Paul. Then it was a relief to meet a boy who treated her in so simple and friendly a way, didn't make silly speeches nor try to be anything more than a pleasant comrade. Tony herself was so fond of outdoor sports and had shared so many boyish games with Paul that she could not endure a different type of companionship.

The week proved warm and sunny, permitting the four to play golf and tennis, walk and

row to their hearts' content. True, there seemed some limitation for every one. Lansing's ankle, still troublesome, permitted him to play golf but not tennis, and they had to consider both him and Archer in planning the length of a walk. Paul could not play tennis either, and though Archer put up a good game, he was no match for Tony. He took a defeat good-naturedly, but waxed wrathful if she imprudently let him win. As a concession to her absent mother, Tony was forbidden to go sailing unless her father was with them.

Fortunately Archer cared little for boating and was quite delighted to spend a morning on the beach with Tony, wrapped in rugs in a sheltered place where they could catch an occasional glimpse of the white sail dipping to the waves.

But Tony's chief grievance was that she was not permitted to try the bathing. To most people the temptation was slight for the month was early April and the temperature of both water and air far from balmy. Mr. Arnold placed no restriction upon Paul's liberty but laid down the law as concerned both Tony and Archer who were obliged to sit on the shore

and wonder whether they really were missing as much as the others pretended.

On Easter Sunday they walked over to the tiny mission church in the seaport town. The bare little chapel afforded for music only a piano and no especial choir, but a brave attempt had been made to decorate it for Easter and a reverent congregation was present. Archer, who knew the church music as he knew his alphabet, sang through the entire service as a matter of course, absolutely unconscious that every one was joyfully permitting his sweet little voice to take the lead. Not until the appreciative curate spoke to them after it was over, did Archer know how much he had added to the beauty of their Easter. Somewhat abashed, he looked appealingly at Tony.

"I loved you to sing for them, ducky!" she whispered encouragingly and Archer was comforted.

School began on the following Thursday and the party reluctantly broke up; Tony and her father to return home, the boys to go back to St. Stephen's.

Archer had certainly been helped by the change, his face was plumper and even tanned

by the sea winds and his appetite was ravenous. Mrs. Holmes would no longer need to call him into her sitting-room to administer chicken broth and milk at unconventional hours. Paul's sprained hand was practically well again, and he looked so much more rested and serene that Mr. Arnold sincerely hoped no shadow of past troubles would follow his return to the familiar school environment.

"Paul," he said, drawing his nephew aside as they stood by the train in the Boston station where the boys had come to see them off. "You won't forget that promise you made me?"

"Who taught me not to forget a promise, Uncle Court?" asked Paul, looking him straight in the face. "I'm going back to a new term with nothing whatever left over from the old one."

"Good boy!" said Mr. Arnold, exchanging a warm handclasp. He took leave of Lansing, kissed Archer, and joined Tony, already in the Pullman. As the train swept them beyond sight of the boys, Tony turned disgustedly to her father.

"Do you see that?" she inquired, exhibiting a neat package. "It's a box of candy and Phil

Lansing gave it to me and it's the first thing he's done that I don't like!"

The sunny Easter vacation was followed by several days of continued rain and cold. Every teacher knows the vague discontent produced in a school by a prolonged storm or any weather preventing outdoor exercise. The younger boys grow homesick, the older wax mischievous. Gymnastic work and plenty of it is one antidote, but constant occupation and amusement must somehow be provided.

The boys in Clarke House were not exactly disorderly, but they were fractious, quarrelsome, and lacking their usual fraternal spirit. Mr. Pomeroy, though housemaster for the youngest boys, taught entirely in the Upper school. On the afternoon of the third consecutive rainy day, having dismissed his last class of big sixth-formers, he betook his way rather wearily to the Nursery. He'd half a mind to ask the next year for a transfer to a house where the boys were older. And yet he rather liked his kids. They weren't hard to manage if handled right and sometimes they were unspeakably funny. Most of them were nice little chaps. All the same he hoped they wouldn't raise a

rough-house that night. If they did, he felt inclined to spank the ring-leaders and send them all to bed.

Scarcely was his study door closed behind him when there came a tap.

"Well, Bryan, what do you and Tommy want?"

"We want to ask you, sir, if you'll be judge at our debate this evening," began Bryan importantly.

"Oh, so there is to be a debate? Come in and tell me about it. Sit down by my fire. What are you going to debate about and how did you think of doing it?"

"Archer planned it and he and Skinny—"

"You mean George?" inquired Mr. Pomeroy politely.

Bryan accepted the amendment. "Archer and George are going to be the speakers. Archer's brother told him how to do it, all about the burden of proof and the rebuffle."

"Rebuttal," interposed Mr. Pomeroy, coughing.

"Yes, rebuttal. And Paul Arnold told Archer about one debate the Upper school had. There was a fellow on the affirmative side, very

cocky. They told him not to turn up his trousers and not to wear a red necktie and not under any condition to quote Latin. He was the first speaker for his side and when he got up, he had his trousers half up his legs and a tie red enough to scare a comet, and immediately he tried a Latin quotation and broke down. It rattled the leader of his side so he forgot all his arguments and lost the debate."

"I recall the painful circumstances," said Mr. Pomeroy. He had, in fact, coached the unlucky wearer of the red tie and at the moment of the breakdown, felt a wild desire to throttle him with it.

"The reason we asked Paul Arnold," Tommy took up the tale, "was because we thought we'd debate on whether women should vote, just as the Upper school did. But Archer couldn't decide which side to take because he didn't know whether his mother was a suffragette or not. Skinny said that a man ought to form his political opinions independently of his female relatives. But Archer said it was a fellow's duty not to take sides against his mother, so he went to ask his brother what Mrs. Arnold thought. But Paul simply hooted

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and wouldn't tell him. After he stopped laughing, he advised Archer to debate on a subject he knew something about, and then he told him about the major premise and syllo-somethings and the rest."

"And having decided against the suffrage question, what is the chosen subject?" inquired Mr. Pomeroy with commendable gravity.

Bryan took a small notebook from his pocket. "Paul Arnold wrote it for Archer in the proper form," he explained, "but we thought of it ourselves. 'Resolved: That oatmeal as an article of daily food is injurious to health.'"

Mr. Pomeroy poked the fire energetically.

"Archer is going to take the affirmative because he simply loathes porridge, and Skinny, I mean George, is going to defend it. And will you be judge? It's to be in the parlor after prayers."

"With pleasure," responded Mr. Pomeroy. "It promises to be a most interesting affair."

The big living-room at Clarke House presented an attractive aspect that evening. A small table, bearing a glass and a pitcher of water had been provided for the debaters, that all might proceed in due order. Twenty ex-

pectant small boys were grouped on furniture or floor. Mr. Pomeroy took a morris chair, and Mrs. Holmes established herself on the couch, between as many little lads as could squeeze in with her. Bryan arose to introduce the speakers. He was soberly clad in dark blue serge with a black tie.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began. Interrupted by a murmur, he looked inquiringly toward the boys piled into the big rocking-chair.

"There's only one lady," came the explanation.

"It's politer to say ladies," said Bryan crushingly. "It makes Mrs. Holmes feel less con-conspicuous. And it's *not* polite to interrupt from the floor. You *are* the floor, Rollo, everybody is floor except me and the debaters. Now I'm going to begin, so don't anybody else say anything.

"Ladies and gentlemen! The subject of debate this evening is: 'Resolved: That oatmeal as an article of daily food is injurious to health.' I will introduce as the speaker for the affirmative, Mr. Archer Loring Arnold."

Archer arose, also soberly clad. He made a bow that did his dancing-master credit and

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surveyed the solemnly interested faces before him. Mr. Pomeroy, leaning on the arm of his chair, kept one hand over his mouth but his eyes were gravely bent on the speaker.

"Ladies and gentlemen," began Archer. "We are to debate whether having oatmeal for breakfast every day is good for us. I maintain that it isn't."

Here Archer paused to consult his notes.

"Can he have it in writing?" inquired the irrepressible Rollo.

"Sh-h!" warned Bryan. "I'll rule you off the floor if you talk any more. They can each have as many notes as they can get on one small card. Paul Arnold said so. Go on, Archer. If he butts in again, I'll fire him."

"Oatmeal," continued the speaker, "is made from oats and oats are fed to horses. Therefore, they were never meant for human beings to eat. It is a—a—pervasion of a natural law to feed them to boys.

"Secondly. It is very hard to cook oatmeal properly. Twelve hours are needed to get it done. Cook told me so. And no cook can spend her whole time cooking oatmeal and nothing else. So it is very seldom properly cooked.

“Thirdly. After it is cooked, it is very disagreeable. Either it is all thin and slimy like snakes, or else it is thick and has lumps in it that stick in your throat. Any way it is cooked it is utterly re-repellent!”

Mr. Pomeroy, clutching his chin, transferred his gaze to the rug.

“Fourthly,” continued Archer, “people are more healthy when they have a variety to eat. Sailors on ships have a dreadful disease because they eat the same things all the time. Oatmeal every day for breakfast is dangerous because of no variety.”

“But what if you like it?” inquired Rollo, moved by keen interest in the argument. Before the chair could speak, he was promptly suppressed by shocked neighbors.

“Fifthly,” went on Archer,—“lastly, I meant to say,—it isn’t good for boys to have to eat things they especially hate. It spoils their dispositions. This is an important fact and people haven’t realized it. They talk about young men sowing wild oats when if the true facts were known, it would probably turn out that they were made to eat oatmeal at the—the—” Archer again consulted his notes,—“at

the formative period of their characters! And if eating oatmeal for breakfast makes you feel cross all day, it is only good common-sense not to eat it. That's all, I think. Do I do anything else?"

Audience, chair and debaters turned expectantly to Mr. Pomeroy, who preserved a discreet silence.

"The rebuff?" suggested Bryan.

"That comes later," said Archer. "Oh, I know, the conclusion. Ladies and gentlemen, I have tried to show you that it is injurious to health to have oatmeal for breakfast every day and I hope you will think I have proved it."

Bowing, Archer sat down amid admiring applause.

"Mr. George Morrison will now present the brief for the negative," announced Bryan.

Skinny arose, his one hundred and ten pounds of avoirdupois in striking contrast to Archer's slight person. Were a concrete example of the nutritive powers of oatmeal desired, he advertised them solidly.

"Ladies and gentleman," he began, then paused to fix a reproving eye on the giggling Tommy. "Gentlemen, I meant. I rise to

speak in favor of having oatmeal every day for breakfast. It is assimilated quickly and every ounce of food is converted into muscle, vigor, and brain activity. It is most economical and is in itself a perfectly balanced food."

Here Skinny paused. This much he had evidently cribbed verbatim from the outer wrapper of a package of Quaker oats.

"Look!" he went on with a sweeping gesture, "look at the great nation of Scotland! What has made her what she is? Oatmeal! For centuries, Scotchmen have been fed upon oatmeal porridge. That in itself is proof that oatmeal is nutritious and makes both brains and muscle. I am acquainted with a Scotchman. He has lived in the United States forty years and he earns a very good living washing windows. From boyhood up he has eaten oatmeal and to this he owes his success in life. Scotch people are noted for their courage and their intelligence. These are largely influenced by what we eat. It is sure proof, therefore, that oatmeal is good for people.

"It is an excellent discipline for boys who don't like things to have to eat them. It strengthens their will power. Therefore, it is

a good thing to eat oatmeal whether you like it or not.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I hope you will decide with me that oatmeal should be eaten every day.”

Skinny subsided amid delighted applause, and Bryan consulted his notes.

“The next thing is the rebuff, no, re-buttal. Anyway, Archer, it's your turn again.”

Archer arose, pink-cheeked, but self-possessed.

“My op—op— my— what is he, Boy Blue?”

“Opposite, I guess,” suggested Bryan.

“My opposite,” began Archer, “says that Scotland is a great nation. I know the answer to that. Perhaps it was once, but now it belongs to Great Britain and they cut off Mary, Queen of Scots' head! And if it was oatmeal brought her to the scaffold, all the more reason not to eat it. Oatmeal does not agree with some people and you can show just as much will power by refusing to eat it as by eating it when you hate it. Yes, more! And if I ate oatmeal for forty years and then had to wash windows for a living, I'd be mad that I ever swallowed any.

“There’s just one thing more. My brother Paul hates oatmeal as much as I do. To prove it isn’t true that you need it for muscle and brains, Paul never eats it and Paul is captain of St. Stephen’s football team!”

The tremendous applause that greeted this rebuttal quite abashed Archer. He subsided in embarrassment.

“Your turn, Skinny,” suggested Bryan.

“I haven’t anything more to say,” announced Skinny, rising slowly, “except that Archer has got the history mixed. England chose a Scottish king, didn’t they, Mr. Pomeroy? And that shows how much eating oatmeal can do for a nation. It has made England as well as Scotland. And, if I’d thought of it, I’d have found out whether Hicks, the baseball captain, doesn’t like porridge!”

“Please now, Mr. Pomeroy, it’s your turn,” said Bryan politely when the applause finally subsided.

Mr. Pomeroy rose with deliberation. During the rebuttal he had evidently undergone severe physical pangs of some nature.

“Mrs. Holmes and gentlemen,” he began with a courteous inclination of his head.

“There!” put in the triumphant Rollo, “that was what they should have said.”

“I have greatly enjoyed this debate,” Mr. Pomeroy went on. “In my opinion both speakers have handled the subject ably and brought to bear upon it subtle and far-reaching arguments. Several in particular have impressed me. Never before, have I heard Mr. Arnold’s strikingly original theory concerning youthful wild oats, nor did I previously realize the fundamental cause of Queen Mary’s downfall. I agree with Mr. Morrison in his proud claims for the brains and brawn of Scotland. It is indeed, difficult to decide just where the honors lie. I even hesitate to offer to such enthusiastic amateurs in the noble art of debate, any serious criticism. But the whole point of any argument must lie in discussing a question that admits of a definite answer. When doctors disagree, who shall decide? And physicians do disagree concerning the benefits of oatmeal.”

Mr. Pomeroy was stopped by the glee of the delighted boys.

“But, granted that the question can be debated,” he went on, “I am inclined to think that Mr. Arnold’s brief for the affirmative presents

the more forcible arguments. Even though personally, I am fond of porridge, Mr. Arnold's graphic words have convinced me that those who do not like it may find it extremely nauseating. To refer, in this pleasant meeting, to such disagreeable things as penalties,—I believe that there exists in Clarke House a rule providing an early bed hour for any boy who three times in one week refuses to eat his porridge. If Mr. Arnold will pardon the painful allusion, I fear that it is due to this rule that we frequently lose his cheerful company from our circle. Now, I am really so impressed by the fluency with which he has pleaded his cause that I feel inclined to ask Mrs. Holmes if she won't reconsider in the case of boys who honestly dislike oatmeal, and let them have a choice of cereal for breakfast."

Mr. Pomeroy got no further for the entire audience arose as one man to surround the laughing matron with shouts of persuasive glee. Archer reached her first, and with his arms around her neck, Bryan beseeching on one side and Tommy on the other and fifteen eager lads falling over her feet and one another, what could she do but yield?

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“You did that rather well, Archer,” said Mr. Pomeroy kindly as the successful orator and Bryan came to say good-night. “You profited, of course, by your brother’s hints, but you showed an intelligent idea of the proper constructive form for a debate, and you really understood the nature of the rebuttal.”

Bryan looked proudly at his room-mate. “I knew Archer would win,” he declared loyally.

“But it was you, Mr. Pomeroy, who got us let off the oatmeal!” Archer’s charming smile lighted his face as he spoke. “If we debate about sitting up half an hour later, will you be judge?”

“My principles would never permit me to be judge in such a discussion,” said the house-master gravely. “I have too firm convictions on that subject. No arguments could move them!”

CHAPTER XXV

ALEX'S DISCOVERY

PAUL resolutely kept the promise made to his uncle. Those hard weeks did not pass without leaving some trace. He was graver, his face had settled into more mature lines, but he no longer seemed resentful, even to Alex and Phil, who best knew what an ordeal the affair of the essay had been to his naturally proud spirit.

On seeing Paul again after their meeting on the river, Patterson had politely inquired for the injured arm. Though their intercourse had since been confined to a nod on passing, the two no longer ignored each other's existence.

Paul flung himself with his usual energy into both work and play, studying hard for the "preliminaries" considered by Archer so mysterious and, finding that his wrist would permit of tennis, going in for the singles with great vigor. Hicks in vain tried to induce him

to come out for the nine; Paul declared that he hadn't an eye for baseball.

So the days passed and the beautiful New England spring came to Riverview, beautiful as it can only be to a country that has known the winter. May bestowed apple-blossoms, June brought roses and examinations. Commencement drew near,—was only a week off.

One hot evening Paul was studying for his last examination on the morrow. Alex, who had finished that day, announced his intention of taking a stroll around the campus.

“If you're going by the Nursery,” said Paul, “will you stop and tell Archer to bring over one of his extra sheets? Mother says she sent me some but the little heathen never gave them to me. They keep putting one on my bed that is all holes and I'm tired of sticking my feet through it. I can't stand it any longer if this *is* the last week.”

The Nursery was enjoying its after-dinner relaxation, but Archer left the game of ball and willingly went up to his room with Alex.

“Oh, yes, there are some sheets,” he remarked cheerfully, “and if Paul wants 'em of

course he can have them, but I don't think Mother ever told me to give them to him."

"Well, fish them out," said Alex, seating himself on Archer's bed and looking around with amused eyes. The room so evidently belonged to two little boys! In one corner was a heap of treasured pine cones and a big hornets' nest. Bryan's stamp album lay open on the window seat; a wooden sword and a discarded Eton collar ornamented Archer's bureau along with a jackknife, a photograph of his mother, a round ball of tar, and a heap of small stones.

"Here they are," said Archer from the depths of his trunk. "But I'll bring them over myself."

"I don't mind toting them. I think Paul wants one to-night," replied Alex. As he lifted the pile, a paper of many folds, fastened with a clip, slid from between the sheets and fell at his feet.

"Why!" said Archer, picking it up. "I'd forgotten all about that. I guess I'd better give it back to Paul now."

Alex had taken the manuscript and as he

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glanced at it, gave a startled look from it to Archer.

"Give it back to Paul? Where did you get this, Gabriel?"

Archer, still kneeling before the open trunk, sat back upon his heels. He did not notice the gravity of Alex's face.

"I took it away a long time ago," he admitted frankly. "It was that day when we were playing pirates and Paul spanked me because we were out of bounds. I took it to get even with him, 'cause then, he'd have to do it over and it would serve him right. Afterwards, almost right away, I didn't care any more and I meant to give it back. But I forgot it. What makes you look so queer?" he added, rather amazed at the expression on a face that usually wore a smile of good comradeship for him.

"Look here, Gabriel," said Alex, sitting down again on the bed. "Tell me just where you got this."

"I don't want to," said Archer, blushing. "I only took it to plague Paul and I didn't mean to keep it so long."

"It happens to be more important than you

realize," replied Alex, kindly but very gravely. "Tell me, did you take it from a pile of essays on Mr. Barrows' desk?"

"Not exactly," admitted Archer. "Mrs. Holmes sent me with a note. Mr. Barrows wasn't there so I went into his study to leave it. I had Patsy with me for company and he wriggled out of my arms and jumped on the desk and batted some papers off. I picked them up but one had gone way under. It's a very big desk. I crawled under after it and just then I heard Paul coming. I know his step. I didn't feel like seeing him after the way he'd treated me, so I stayed where I was. He went right away again. Then I came out with the paper and I saw it was Paul's essay. I decided I wouldn't put it back but keep it a little while just to get even with him for licking me. So I poked Patsy out from under the couch and came and put the essay in my trunk. I didn't think of it but once again. Did Paul have to do it over? He never said anything about it."

"No, he didn't write it again," said Alex slowly. "You see, this essay doesn't happen to be Paul's."

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“Not Paul’s? But that was his subject. I knew about it for I saw the stuff that came from Uncle Court. And he told me he was going to sign himself Ajax. It was a secret, but he let me into it. I thought it was his.”

Archer’s puzzled and bewildered eyes were fixed on the older boy who was looking extremely serious.

“Oh, Gabriel,” he suddenly exclaimed, thrusting his fingers through his hair, “what a giddy mess you and Patsy have managed to get us into! Where were you the two mornings when Dr. Hilton spoke in chapel about the missing essay?”

“I guess it was when I had tonsilitis over in the infirmary. I never heard one single word about the essay. What is the matter?”

“Well, you see, this isn’t Paul’s essay. It happened that there was another fellow who wrote on that same subject and just by chance, hit on the same name to sign it with. The judges read the essays and gave the prize to the one who had written under the name of Ajax. When they came to open the envelopes with the real names, there were two marked Ajax but only one essay. Mr. Barrows remembered that

when they were given him he noticed the two with the same pseudonym. But now there was only one essay left."

Archer's wide blue eyes expressed puzzled concern but no real understanding of the situation.

"The essay that was left, was Paul's," went on Alex. "The one you took does look like Paul's writing, but it belongs to a fellow who isn't very friendly with Paul. You surely knew that Paul had a hard time with the football team and that we lost both match games?"

"I didn't know why," said poor Archer, beginning to understand that he had done something very much worse than he knew.

"We didn't win, largely because this especial fellow worked against Paul. Well, when it came out that one essay was missing, Mr. Barrows tried to find out who had been in his study during the few minutes he was away. Paul at once said that he went in to leave a notice but that he went out immediately."

"He did," remarked Archer. "I was under the desk."

"You can see how it was, can't you? Paul was the only one known to have been in the

study. Paul had good reason to feel resentful against Patterson, and it was Patterson's essay that was missing. And the judges had voted in Paul's favor. It was a pretty fishy situation for anybody!"

"Did they think Paul did it? *Paul?*" demanded Archer, turning pale as the idea dawned on him.

"No one who knew Paul thought so. Dr. Hilton stood by him. Mr. Barrows said he'd believe in Paul until the last gun was fired, and all his friends had faith in him. But Patterson has friends, too, and they sided with him. Some nasty things were said, Gabriel, and Paul had to stand it."

"I don't understand," said Archer pitifully. "Patterson is my friend. Who did get the prize?"

"Paul refused to take it. He asked permission to withdraw his essay and the judges let him. Patterson was given the chance to write his over again and he wouldn't. So they gave the prize to the essay they thought next best. Harry Hotchkiss got it."

Archer was silent. An expression of consternation was spreading over his face.

"What are you going to do about it, Gabriel?" Alex asked. It was evident that Archer at last understood the situation.

"I'll take the essay to Paul and tell him I took it," said Archer bravely.

"That would be all right had it really been Paul's essay," Alex answered gently. "I only wish it had been! Oh, Gabriel, you may not understand why I think so, but honest, old chap, it's up to you to go and tell Dr. Hilton before you say one single word to Paul."

The reason for this was beyond Archer's comprehension. He stared helplessly at Alex, his face expressing both fright and contrition.

"It's the only thing for you to do. Just take the essay and go and tell him exactly how it happened, about Patsy and everything."

Archer was silent for a moment. In some way he had done something far worse than he had any idea, and, what mattered still more, people thought Paul had done it.

"I'll go," he said bravely.

"You're the stuff, Gabriel!" replied Alex encouragingly. "Tell him all about it just as you have to me. Come on. He'll be in his office now and you can get it over with."

CHAPTER XXVI

IN THE DOCTOR'S STUDY

ALEX walked with Archer across the campus, his sympathy more and more aroused by the expression on the white little face. With his lips set so firmly, Archer looked strikingly like Paul.

"Don't be afraid, old chap," Alex said kindly as they reached the office. "Doc always understands and he always meets a fellow half-way. Just be plucky and make a clean breast of it."

Paul was still studying when his room-mate returned, his attention concentrated on his task. Fully ten minutes passed before he closed his book with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Hello! Did Archer say he'd bring those sheets?"

"Sheets? What sheets?" asked Alex, turning from the window where he was gazing out with eyes that saw neither the distant hills nor the twilight sky.

Paul gave a grunt between amusement and disgust.

"Oh, yes, I remember," went on Alex. "Gabriel had them but we both forgot about bringing them."

"Never mind. I'll have to look him up, anyway, for Mother inclosed a note for him in this letter. I'll just put these accounts in shape and then go over."

Alex took a book and began a pretense of reading. Sooner or later the Doctor would send for Paul. He hoped it might be soon. Complete justification for those hard weeks was at hand but in a form that could but cause Paul additional pain.

Half an hour passed silently in Study 18. Then among the footsteps traversing the corridor came some that paused at their open door.

"Is Mr. Arnold here?" asked the voice of one of the janitors. "The Doctor's wanting you, sir. He's waiting in the office."

Paul cast a startled glance at Alex, but rose at once. "Wonder what he wants! All right, Michael, I'll come right away."

Alex made no comment and Paul, looking surprised, went out. Had the Doctor wanted to

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talk with him about studies or standing he would have been notified in the usual way after morning chapel. It must be for some emergency. Was Archer ill? But Alex had just seen him. What could it be?

Paul could not get out of his head the idea that the summons was somehow connected with Archer, but his amazement was great when he entered the anteroom by one door just as Patterson came in by the other. Both stopped in surprise but before either could speak, Dr. Hilton appeared from the inner office.

"Yes," he said gravely, "I sent for you both. There is something you each should know. Come in."

Archer, very pale, was standing by the side of Dr. Hilton's swivel chair. At the expression that came over his brother's face, he turned even whiter. The principal seated himself again and taking some folded papers from his desk, held them out to Patterson.

"Is that your missing essay?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir," Patterson replied, after a second's examination.

"Now, Archer," said Dr. Hilton kindly, putting his arm around the slight little figure that

was fairly quivering before Paul's stern face, "I want you to tell your brother and Patterson exactly what you told me a few minutes ago."

Archer obeyed, bravely and faltering but once at a muffled exclamation from Paul. At the conclusion of his story there was perfect silence. Patterson, twirling the recovered essay between his fingers, was looking at the floor in an embarrassed manner. Paul, almost as pale as Archer, leaned back in his chair with averted face.

"This explains the mystery of the essay," said Dr. Hilton, breaking the silence. "Archer did not realize nor intend the injury he did you both. It is greater for you, Patterson, than for Arnold, since you are leaving school this term, while he will have another opportunity to compete for the prize next year. Having heard Archer's story, neither of you can believe that he meant to do the harm he succeeded in doing. But the injury is just as real as if it had been planned maliciously. I shall, of course, in justice to you, Patterson, explain the affair at chapel to-morrow."

Another silence fell. Patterson looked uncomfortable and Paul sat like a statue. Ar-

cher, still within Dr. Hilton's encircling arm, had hidden his face on the principal's shoulder.

"Explanation is due to you also, Paul," went on Dr. Hilton. "Though none of us who knew you well believed for an instant that you had anything to do with the abstraction of the essay, still, you were the only person known to enter Mr. Barrows' study. Had Archer not been in the infirmary, he would have heard about the trouble and if at any time, he had known, he would have owned up, wouldn't you, Archer?"

There was a choked assent. Paul still sat motionless and the rustling of Patterson's essay as he nervously twiddled it in his fingers alone broke the stillness. The principal sat watching the two, an inscrutable expression masking his face. Paul could not speak first, for Paul, by the very nature of the case, could make no plea for the small sinner. Had Patterson really in him the nobler qualities Dr. Hilton felt certain only waited an awakening? Three long moments passed, ending with a suppressed sob from Archer. At its sound, Patterson looked up.

“Dr. Hilton, I don’t care about any public explanation. I’ve always liked Archer. He didn’t mean it,—he only meant to plague Arnold for a day or so. He just forgot to return it. To have the whole affair explained before the school is too tough a penalty for a little chap like him.”

“Archer did it and he must take the consequences,” cut in Paul in a cold, impersonal tone.

“I am willing!” said Archer, lifting a proud yellow head. “I didn’t know I was being so bad. When I first came here, I asked Paul to change names with me ’cause I was afraid I’d disgrace this one without knowing it. Dr. Hilton can tell everybody I took the essay. I’ll tell them myself if he wants me to! I *want* the boys to know, so nobody can ever think you did it, Paul. And Patterson is my friend, too. I didn’t mean to hurt him either.”

Paul’s rigid pose softened a little. At least the culprit was no coward. A sympathetic smile crossed the principal’s face and he stroked the curly yellow head with a gentle hand.

“It’s hardly fair,” went on Patterson, turning to Dr. Hilton, “to punish Archer as though he knew what he was doing. Only the fellows

who are used to kids at home will understand that he never meant it. If it's explained to the whole school, it's an awful punishment. He can never live it down. And he's such a little chap."

Still, Dr. Hilton was silent. Would Patterson say the one thing he was hoping for?

"Arnold, I did you an injustice," said Patterson, looking for the first time at Paul. "I thought you took the essay. You had a big score to settle with me and it was a chance to even things up."

A sudden light came into Dr. Hilton's eyes. Paul looked up.

"I was envious of you in the beginning," Patterson went on. "I wanted the captaincy. It's, well,—it's the only kind of school honor my father cares much about. When I came out for the team, I meant to play up to you, but at first you didn't get the fellows together and I got sore thinking how much easier I could have done it. Somehow, I felt that the coach thought so, too. Well, I let myself go in the Sudbury game,—yes, I tripped you. And I let Faulkner through the line. Afterwards, I saw that in laying you out, I'd played false to the school.

And after all, the school means a good deal to me."

The color was coming back to Paul's face as he looked intently at Patterson. Both were oblivious of the others.

"What you said to the fellows after the Faulkner game showed me where I stood," Patterson continued. "And then when the school cheered us at the station—I—I realized what I'd done. And I was sorry. But it was no use to say so; you wouldn't have believed it. Then when this essay business came up, I simply thought you'd taken your chance to get even."

"But I thought the same of you," said Paul, leaning forward. "I thought you took away your own essay just to make it impossible for me to have the prize."

Patterson looked surprised. "I don't wonder," he admitted. "After the trick I played you with Faulkner, you had a right to think me capable of 'most anything. But I ought not to have suspected you. Down at the bottom I knew you weren't that sort. I knew it, because—" Patterson hesitated,—"because, with all you had against me, you didn't prevent my chumming with Gabriel."

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There was another pause. Paul's steady gray eyes were bent on the floor. Dr. Hilton still sat in silence.

"Can't we call the whole thing ended?" Patterson asked with real dignity, turning to the principal as he spoke. "Hotchkiss had the prize weeks ago. It can't do anybody any earthly good to explain publicly. Gabriel didn't mean it any more than his kitten did. If you'll let him off completely and Arnold will accept it, I'll feel that it's making up a little for my disloyalty to St. Stephen's."

Across the face of the principal came a look of extreme satisfaction as two outstretched hands met in a close grip. His faith in Patterson's better nature was justified! And Paul had met him half-way!

Neither said anything more. Patterson, flushed but composed, looked inquiringly at Dr. Hilton.

"It shall be as you wish," replied the principal. "No one except Mr. Barrows need ever know. We will consign the entire affair to oblivion and I hope that with it, you will both bury all that the year has held of ungenerous rivalry and misunderstanding."

After Patterson had gone, both Dr. Hilton and Paul turned to Archer. Deprived when the principal rose of a protecting arm, and not grasping the full significance of the scene before him, he retreated to the couch behind the desk where he buried his face in the cushions. Paul hesitated but a second before pulling the limp little figure into his arms. Archer clung to him with renewed sobs of penitence.

"Archer," said Dr. Hilton, sitting down before the two, "I respect you very much for trying so honestly to atone for your wrong-doing. I respect you too, for your willingness to take the penalty. But I think the knowledge of how you have hurt Paul is punishment enough. If you are ever again tempted to take revenge upon anybody for a real or fancied injury, I hope you will remember this experience."

"You'd better tell me not to be a brute to him," said Paul half under his breath. "I ought not to have licked him."

"I told you so when you did it," remarked Archer unexpectedly. "But you may do it now if you choose."

"I don't choose," said Paul, joining Dr. Hilton in a smile. "We've both made a mistake,

Archer. But I reckon we'll have to forgive each other and start again."

Through the open office windows floated the scent of roses and the sound of distant music. Some one in Sanderson was playing a violin. Across on the chapel steps the seniors had begun to sing. Another year was coming for Paul, one that would open unhampered by the troubles of this, and thanks to Patterson,—perhaps to Nelly,—Archer could return with an unclouded name.

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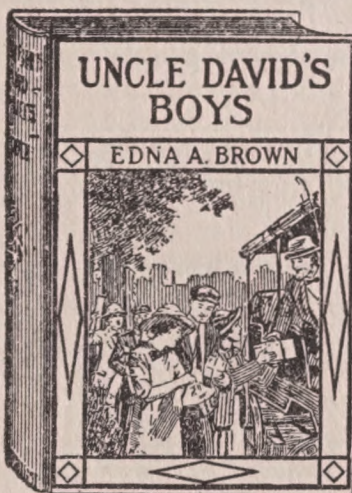


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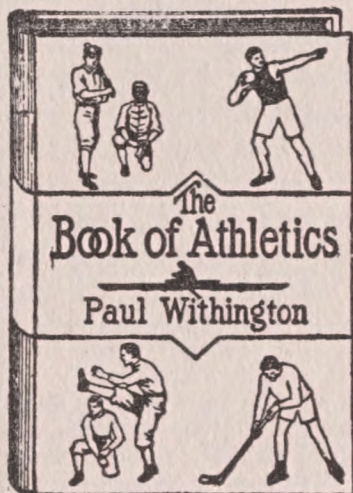
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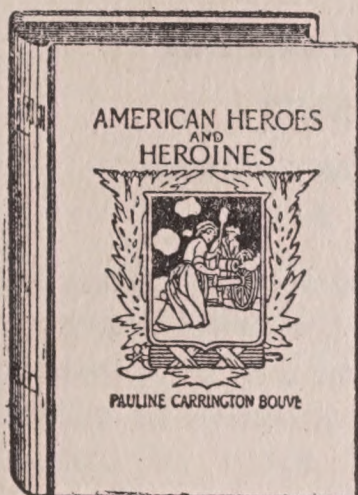
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